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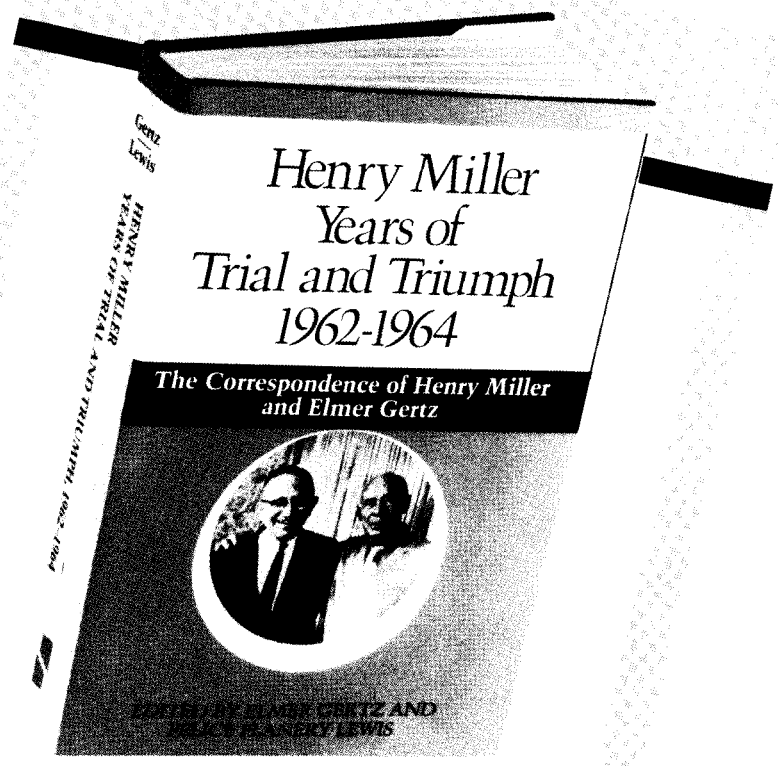

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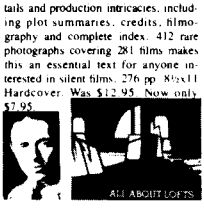

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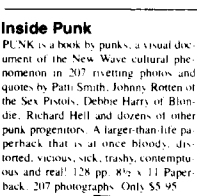

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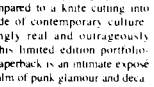

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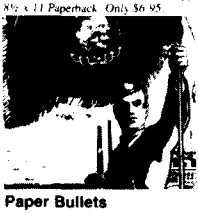

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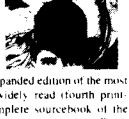

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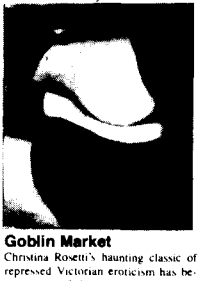

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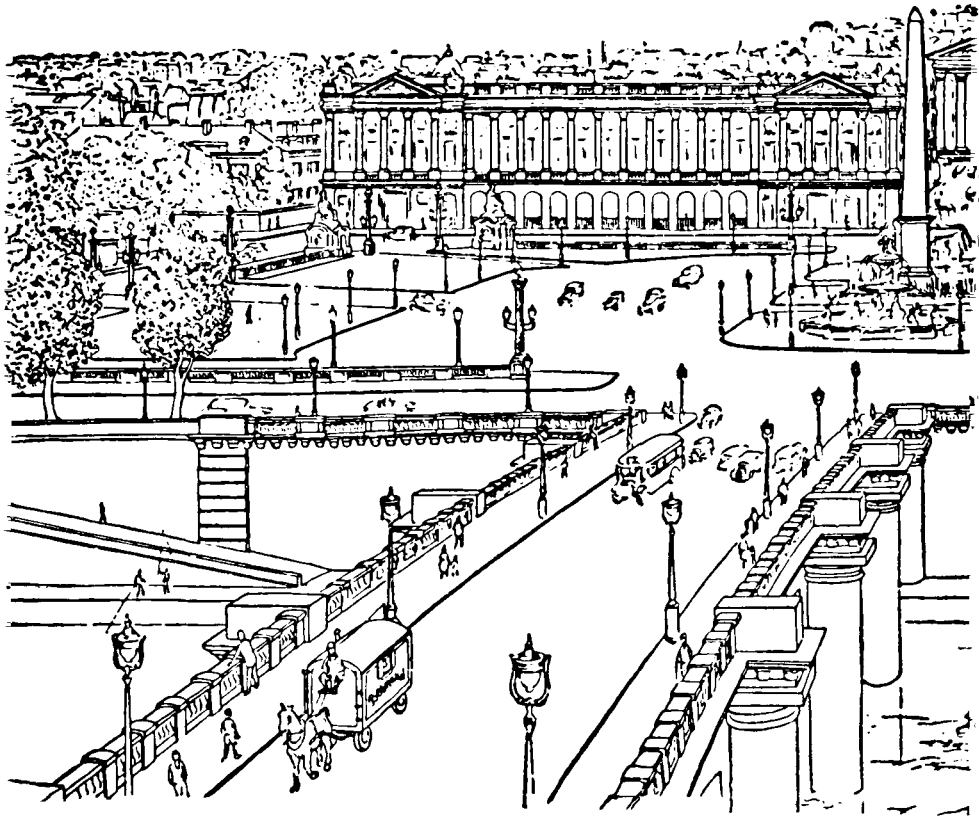

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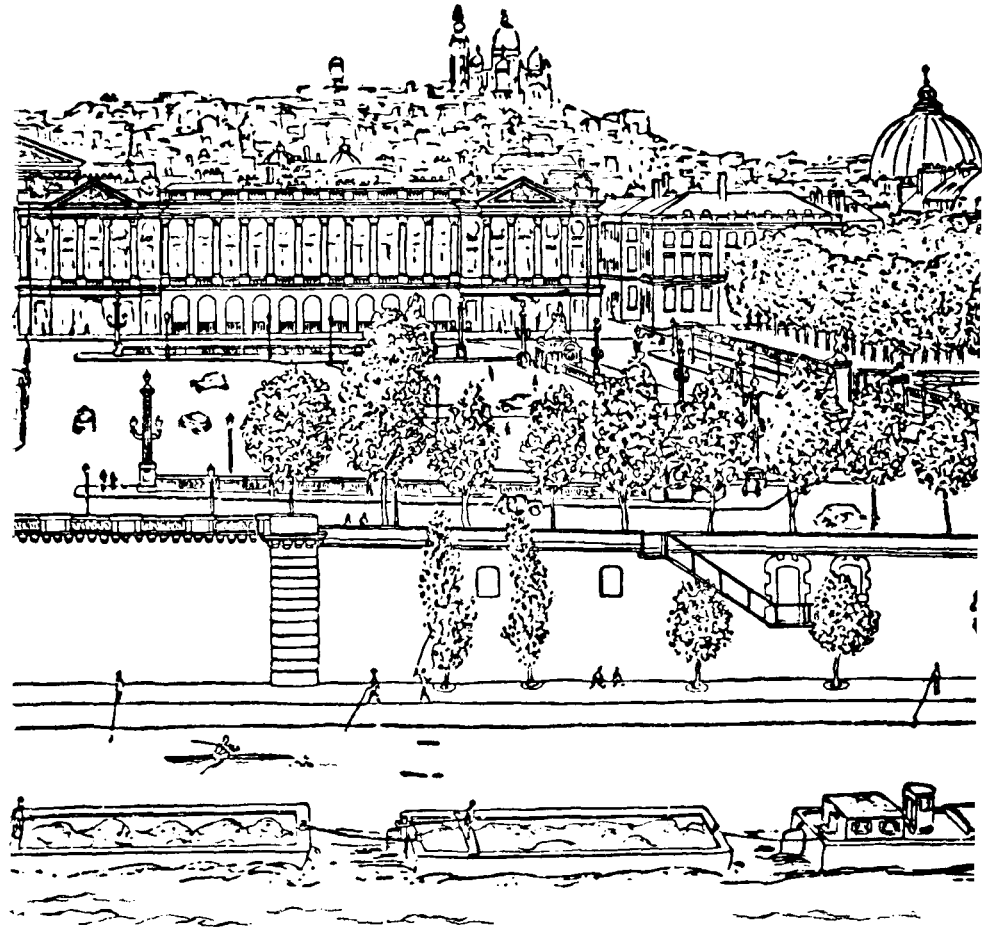

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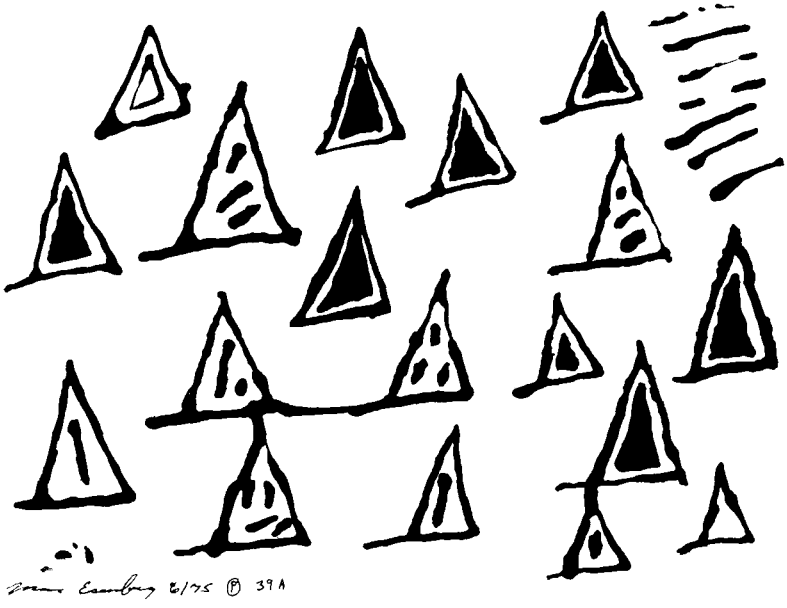

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Night Flight to Stockholm

Dallas Wiebe

I owe all this to Gabriel Ratchet. It was he who arranged for the round-trip ticket, two seats side by side, on Scandinavian Airlines, got me my reservation in the King Gustaf Holiday Inn, deodorized my basket, put in the new sheets, put on my new, formal black sack with the white ribbon drawstring around the top and bathed my suppurating stumps for the journey. He even carried one end of my wicker laundry basket when I went aboard. In the darkness, I heard him instructing the stewardesses as to how to clean me, how to feed and water me and when to turn me. I heard money changing hands. I heard his stomachy laugh and the ladies' bovine grunts. I think I heard a stewardess pat his little bald head. Then came my first lift-off. The great surge of the old Boeing 747 sliding my butt and stumps agains one end of the basket and then the floating and my ears popping. Into glorious, golden dreams in my black chute. Into non-stop gliding through images of published books, careful emendations, green surgical gowns, and the rustle of paper money, the clink of prizes and the odor

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of immortality. It was Gabriel Ratchet who gave me this slow drifting in the darkness 50,000 feet over Iceland, the North Atlantic, Ireland, England, the North Sea and Norway as we, as I hear from the pilot, descend into our landing pattern for Stockholm and me about to meet the king of Sweden and, I assume, his wife and all the little royalties. I wonder what they'll sound like; I wonder how they'll smell.

I owe all this to Gabriel because he is an expert in contracts. He's made contracts for musicians, painters, sculptors, quarterbacks, pole vaulters, jugglers, born-again Christians and presidents. He's negotiated the careers of farmers, professors, poets, priests, baseball pitchers, terrorists and airline pilots. For the past thirty years he's had his hand in more success than you can shake a scalpel at because of his immense number of contacts. He says he brought it with him from the womb. I can believe it.

Gabriel—his clients call him Gabe or Gabby—was born on the western slope of Muckish Mountain in Donegal in 1935, exact day unknown he says, when his mother saw some white horses hung with silver bells. He came to Chicago, IL., he says, when the potato crop failed around Bloody Foreland in 1951. I don't remember any potato famines in Ireland since the nineteenth century, but I'm always willing to lend him an ear and listen to his stories. He came to Chicago, he says, because he is a creature of our own flesh and blood and likes a city where every man has his price. He says his contracting business didn't go well at first. In fact, he was on his last leg when he met Isobel Gowdie in October, 1956, in the Chicago Art Institute while he and she were standing and staring at some water lilies by Monet. According to his own account, Gabriel sighed and said, "Hell, Peg Powler can paint better than that." Isobel, having an eye to the main chance, immediately answered, "Richard Tarlton has one foot in the grave. Can you give him a hand?" Gabe's life as a public servant and a successful entrepreneur began with that moment because he negotiated a contract whereby for a shake and a cut Ambroise Paré became the first wealthy one-armed undertaker in Hellwaine, ME.

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I first met Gabe in the lobby of the Palmer House in December of 1977 when I was there for an MLA convention. He was loitering around the packed lobby, looking, I later found out, for failures with whom he could do some business. He was sidling about, handing out, quietly and covertly, little business cards, red letters on green, that gave his name, Gabriel "Ballybofey" Ratchet, his office, 1313 Spoorne Ave., Chicago, his telephone number, 393-6996, his office hours, "At Your Convenience," his profession, "Contractor," and his motto, "Don't limp in obscurity; get a leg up on this world." He gave me his last card and said he'd never seen so many potential clients. He said he'd had his eye on me for some time and I was cut to the quick. We chatted, there in that mob, for a while and I asked him about himself. He told me that he was short because of that potato famine in his youth. His nose and ears were gnarled because his mother had been frightened by Peg O'Nell when she, his dear mother, was nursing him and her left teat had immediately dried up while in his mouth. His teeth were rotted out and his head was bald because his wife of two years, Joan Tyrrie of Creke Abbey, MT., had tried to poison him with bat slobber. He managed, he said, to overcome the poison by eating stuffed grasshoppers, roasted ants and mice roasted whole and threw her into the Chicago River. He said she'd been bad from the start and he was surprised his marriage in the year of 1955 lasted the two years that it did. Gabe said that her stepmother had given her a bottle of flat beer and some sour bread for a dowry and that after their marriage in Calkett Hall all she wanted to do was to be friendly with the goats and comb their beards. He said there was saltpeter in her heaven and gold in her hell and that her angels were sufficiently embodied to be impeded by their armor and damaged by gunpowder. I told him my problems and he said that I was too old to fool around any longer, that I would have to fight tooth and nail to make it. I said I'd call him if I needed his service.

I needed his help a lot sooner than I thought then because my paper which I presented at that MLA convention was

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laughed at. When I began my opening remarks I heard tittering. When I asked for silence, they guffawed. When I introduced my paper—"Metaphorical Thinking as the Cause of the Collapse of British and American Literature" by Professor Meyric Casaubon, Department of English, University of Tylwyth Teg, Wales, OR.—they hooted and snarled and shot out their lips. They waggled their beards and gnashed their teeth on their pipe stems. Even my old friend, Bock Urisk, who claimed he could hear grass growing, could run so fast when he was young that he had to keep one leg over his shoulder to stay in sight, could break stones on his thighs they were so hard and could spin a windmill by blowing through one nostril, waved his open palms past his ears and held his nose. I got the message when Richard Tynney of Gorleston, DE., the chairman of the panel, and Sir John Shepe of Wanstrowe, IA., the moderator, got up, dropped their pants and showed me their bare asses. I was mooned for metaphors and that was the end, I thought. I walked off the stage, my green suit striking among the black turtle necks, my thick black hair bobbing over the seated howlers, my hooked nose, my protuberant chin and my green eyes lifted high in disdain, even though I was without socks and my huge belly bounced and rumbled. I walked out of the room, my white Converse All-Stars squeaking on the waxed floors, my white tie and my blue shirt spotted with my sweat. I decided then to go back to what I'd always been doing anyway, writing fiction. I took out the green card with the red letters.

It was a Thursday when I lifted the phone and called him. I said, "Gabe, I'm going to be sixty-six tomorrow, Friday, January 13, 1978, and I've been writing fiction all my life and no one's ever published a word of it and I'd give my left pinkie to get into *The Paris Review.*" And I did because Gabriel was interested at once and told me that he'd get in touch with me the next day because he thought he might find a buyer. He did. The next day Gabe came around and said he had a friend, Tom Reid, whose ancestor was killed at the battle of Pinkie in 1547 and who needed to get his self-respect back. According to

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Gabriel, Tom had agreed to see to it that my story, "Livid With Age," would be published in *The Paris Review* for my left pinkie. And he did. He told me to type my story, double-spaced, on clean white paper. Not to use eraseable paper. He said I should make my setting exact in place and time, not to moralize at the end of my story and to get rid of the false intensifiers like "literally," "really," "utterly," "just," "veritable," "absolutely," "very" and "basically." Create emphasis by syntax, he said. He also told me to clean the sweat stains off. I did all that and when my story came out, I went to Dr. Dodypol and had the finger removed surgically and under anasthesia. His head nurse, Kate Crackernuts, wrapped the finger in cotton bandages and in red tissue paper with a yellow ribbon around it and I walked out a published author and weighing three ounces less than when I walked in. And made money on it too, because the operation cost fifty dollars and I was paid sixty for my story.

A month after the appearance of "Livid With Age," I sent another story out, "Liam Sexob Lives in Loveland," to *TriQuarterly*. It seemed like it came back the same day, although of course it didn't, and I knew that I needed Gabriel Ratchet again and his influence. I found him sitting in the Trywtyn Tratyn Pub, drinking Habitrot and flirting with Jenny Greenteeth. "Look, Gabe," I said, "I need help. I'd give my left testicle to get my story in *TriQuarterly*." Gabe didn't even look at me when he said, "Make it two and I think I can get you a deal." I allowed as how I'd probably go along with it and he said he'd talk to Marmaduke Langdale, who needed them for his Whitsun Rejoicings. Gabe did and I did. Dr. Nepier from Lydford in Bercks and his head nurse, Sarah Skelbourn, removed them on a cold Friday in December of 1978. Sarah wrapped them in white bandages, green tissue paper and red ribbons. I took them to Gabriel, who was satisfied with the merchandise and told me that Marmaduke Langdale said I should change the title of the story to "Silence on the Rive Gauche," change the name of the main character Liam Sexob to Burd Isobel, eliminate the doublings, get rid of the

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colloquial style, erase the tear stains from the margins of pages 4, 14 and 22, and stop using exclamation points, dashes, underlinings for emphasis and the series of periods that indicate ellipses. I did all that. Retyped the story on good, twenty pound linen bound and sent it off to *TriQuarterly*. They accepted it within a week and I was on my way to my second story in print.

When "Silence on the Rive Gauche" came out, I asked Gabriel Ratchet to be my permanent agent. He agreed and in July of 1979 Dr. Louis Marie Sinistrari and his colleague, Isidore Liseaux, removed my left hand which I figured I didn't need anyway because I can only type with my right hand and right arm, wrapped it in blue and red striped gift paper, tied it with black ribbon, and sent it to Mr. Greatorex, the Irish Stroker, who wrote back from the Island of Hy Brasil, MD., that I should stop using participial phrases, get the inactive detail out of my descriptions, stop using literary language with its euphemisms and circumlocutions and not to use exclamations such as "needless to say," "to my amazement" and "I don't have to tell you." He also suggested that I not send in pages with blood stains on them. I did everything he said and *Esquire* accepted my story, "Moles' Brains and the Right to Life."

Even though I was still anemic from my last publication, I decided in January of 1980 to bid for the *New Yorker*. Gabe sent out the message and Durant Hotham wrote from Yatton Keynel, ME., that he would do it for a pair of ears if I would promise to stop using abnormal word order, get rid of the *faux-naif* narrator, eliminate all cliches from my narrative, would isolate point of view in one character or one narrator and would clean my snot off the manuscript. I did what he said and sent in the manuscript of "Muckelawee." Durant wrote back his thanks for the contract and told me to visit Peg Powler at 1369 Kelpie Street and she would have some directions for me. I went. She had directions and told me to go to Dr. Arviragus at the Abbey Lubbers Clinic. I went. When I walked out of the Clinic, I had my ears in a red and gold bag tied at the

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top with green ribbon. The stumps on the sides of my head tingled in the cold air as I walked out into a new reputation as one of the finest short story writers in America.

When I suggested a book of short stories to Gabriel, he shivered. He suggested that I rest for a while and get myself together before I made any more deals. I told him he'd made a lot of money off my publications and that he would make a lot more. Just to do his work as my agent and let me worry about the parts. He did admit that he had an offer. That he needed a left arm, even if there was no hand attached to it. A Dr. William Drage of Hitchin, AR., needed it to fit out Margaret Barrance so that she could attend a ball because not having a left arm there was nothing for her to lay across the shoulder of her male partner while she danced. Gabriel told me that I would have to go to Hitchin for the transplant. I agreed and I did in March of 1981. But before he removed the left arm, he told me that the deal was contingent on my editing my manuscript carefully, to carefully control the secondary patterns, to make the deuteragonist more important in all the stories, to research materials for the stories, to make the stories more weird, more strange, more uncomfortable for the reader. Clean the ear wax off my pages. I promised I'd do all he told me to do and he took my arm and sewed it onto Margaret, who six months later danced in her first ball at the age of thirty-three, wearing a blue and gold dress with a red sash around her waist, while Doubleday published my collection of short stories, *The Cry of Horse and Hattock* (September, 1981).

Because my recovery times were lengthening, I decided that a novel should be my next reduction and when I mentioned it to Gabriel Ratchel he fell on the floor and chortled. I told him to get his little carcass off the floor and get to work. He did. He got bids for my nose, my feet, my legs, my eyes, my penis and my kidneys. I bid one left foot. The law firm of Morgue, Arsile and Maglore handled the negotiations and in February of 1982 Ratchel finalized the contract with Miss Ruth Tongue of Somerset, KS., by which I agreed to furnish her with one left foot in return for the publication of my novel, *Flibberty*

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Gibbet, by Knopf. My part of the contract was that I had to stop misusing "transpire," "problematical," "livid," "momentarily," "presently" and "loin." My sentences were to be made more simple. I was to use more active verbs with agents doing actions. I was to get out the melodrama. I also agreed not to use any anthropomorphizing metaphors, not to personify anything not human, to make only direct descriptions of characters, objects and actions and not to leak urine on my manuscript. Gabriel also negotiated an interesting addendum to the contract and that was that if the book could be made to win a national prize then my part of the bargain was the left foot and the whole left leg. Wouldn't you know; Ms. Tongue got the whole leg when *Flibberty Gibbet,* clad in a dust jacket of red, black and orange, won the National Book Award for 1982. They carried me up to the podium in a rocking chair and I shook hands for the last time when I accepted the award.

Rachet's account books, which he read to me before I left O'Hare, read as follows after that:

April 4, 1983: Right foot. To Tommy Rawhead of Asmoday, ND. Complicate the emotional and psychological dimensions of the action. Careful selection of names. Vary sentence rhythms. Tonal variation. Shit off pages. Novel: *Brachiano's Ghost.* Macmillan. Black and grey cover. Red chapter headings. Plus right leg: Pulitzer Prize. Done.

July 16, 1984: Right hand. To Elaby Gathen of Hackpen, MI. Correct spelling of "existence," "separate" and "pursue." No redundancy in nouns and verbs and their modifiers. Play games with readers. No slobbering on pages. Book of short stories: *The Blue Hag of Winter.* Random House. Gold on black cover. Red title page. Right arm also: O' Henry Award, St. Lawrence Award for Fiction and Chair at Columbia. Done.

February 10, 1985: Two eyes. To Billy Blind of Systern, DE. No use of "etc.," the suffix "-wise," correct use of "as." No rhetorical questions in narrative. No openings with dialogue. No flashbacks. Include all senses in

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descriptions. No pus on pages. Two volume novel: *Sammael.* Little, Brown. Red, green and blue cover. Nobel Prize. Done.

As I float over the shadowed northern world, I think now that we all go off into darknesses, bit by bit, piece by piece, part by part. We all disintegrate into our words, our sentences, our paragraphs, our narratives. We scatter our lives into photographs, letters, certificates, books, prizes, lies. We ride out the light until the records break one by one. We sit out the days until the suns get dimmer and dimmer. We lie about in the gathering shadows until North America, South America, Australia, Antarctica, Asia, Africa and Europe lie about on the dark waters of our globe. It is crack time in the world of flesh. It is shatter time in the world of limbs. It is splatter time in the world of bones. It is the last splinter of the word. I have tasted the double-deal. I have smelled the slight-of-hand. I have heard the cryptic whisper. I have felt the cold riddle. Because no one stands apart from his stone. No one laughs apart from his crust. No one breathes apart from his shriveling. No one speaks apart from his silence. To lie down in a wicker basket is not to lie apart. To be turned on soft, pus-soaked sheets is not to be turned alone. To be fed through tubes is not to eat alone. To drink and choke is to spit up for all. To float through the night is the journey we all take sooner or later until the bright and shining morning star breaks and there is no more.

I can feel the huge plane starting to descent. My seventy-four year old ears are popping. The stewardess who smells like a dead dog has already rolled me over so that I won't aspirate if I vomit. She's strapped me tightly in place on my two seats. I can feel the safety belts across my rump and ribs. I feel the descent into darkness and I know that I have not given up anything that I could not do without. I know that you can live with less than you came in with. I know that wholeness is not everything and that if you will give an eye for a prize you'll be a sure winner. I can feel my long, white hair sliding and shaking over my stumpy ears as the plane bucks and banks for the landing. I can imagine the attendants in black knickers

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with the little black bows by the knees who will carry me onto the clapping stage. I can imagine the old black king squinting through his thick glasses down into the wicker basket with the two handles and the white Cannon sheets. As my snot begins to leak out over my upper lip, I can hear myself asking him to clean the ear wax out of my shallow ears so that I can hear him clearly when he extols the virtues of long-suffering, when he prattles about how some people overcome severe handicaps and go on to greatness, when he maunders about the indomitable will of the human spirit, while the old black queen gurgles and snickers down at the heady, winning lump. And I hope it's a prince, princess or princeling who will hold the microphone down into the basket so that while pus oozes from my eye sockets I can whisper my acceptance speech. I hope I can control my saliva. I hope I don't shed tears. I wonder if there will be flowers to add their smells to the noises, the tastes and the temperatures. I wonder if anyone will manage to get a sip of Champagne to me. That thumping, bumping and bouncing must be the runway.

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Elizabeth Macklin

Brooding

I have a partridge egg,
a gift from a man
who found it in some field straw
near his home.

I find it every day in my own house
on a round, low table.
A bowl of envelopes sits beside it,
air-mail letters.

They go unanswered, but are paper-thin,
crisp with intentions.
They are red and blue with striped edges.
The egg is brown
like sugar with drops of water on it,
speckled, and white.

Five years it's been on the same table.
I've never had a partridge.
Some years are fruitful and some aren't;
you can never tell.

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Karen Swenson

Pockets

The point of clothes was line,
a shallow fall of cotton over childish hips
or a coat ruled sharp, shoulder to hem

but that line was marred by hands
and all the most amazing things
that traveled in them to one's pockets
goitering the shape of grace with gifts—

a puff-ball only slightly burst
five links of watch chain passed secretly in class
a scrap of rabbit fur almost as soft as one's own skin.

Offended at my pouching of her Singer stitch
my mother sewed my pockets up
with an overcast tight as her mouth
forbidding all but the line.

I've lived for years in her seams—
falls of fabric smooth as slide rules
my hands exposed and folded from all gifts.

And it is only recently that with raw fingers
which remember warmth and the shape of presents
I've plucked out stitches sharp as urchin spines
to find both hands and pockets empty.

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Two Poems by Paul Jenkins

November

It's true
I wanted silence
longed for it but
not this much

Faces bob across the window
like TV with the sound off

In cold rain or snow
everyone seems to be speaking
Serbo-Croatian
into little cartoon balloons
that puff to one side
then dissolve

I must have erased a few trees
too by mistake
carried away
a special talent for
uncreation

because the sky is falling
past the horizon
only birches stripped to the bone
the instant they touch air
white white and trembling

Winter that promises to draw
a clean gag over every mouth

A truck goes by on its bed
a load of ghostly blue cabbages

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two or three heads bouncing behind on the pavement
the sun a pale shout
turned wholly inward

In another world
in another world
if I wanted silence
completely as
lovers do
both before and after
would there be more to hear

like ancient
modern poets
who caress a stone
and it speaks
viola
silence or
Esperanto

What other world

What I wanted was
just a little quiet
to unclutter myself

and now November
its muffled sound
already had disappeared
into December's even thinner air

Look ma no hands

I can see my voice
swaying on a long stalk
its roots beginning to tear loose
inside my chest

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and I go on talking
day after day
like a doubtful magician
who has the knack
of spiriting things away
and tries to remember what next

as though I really wanted
to be mute
like a deaf choir
gesturing in unison
such skillful hands
making sounds reappear
as real objects
a factory of forgers
working in total silence

A Party Near the Coast

To wake up in a strange room
and realize what I am seeing
is ocean my god
a grey haze
through which a long ship looms
touching nearly both sides of the windowframe

Something wonderful has happened
The city which surrounds this house
has vanished
I can hear the small troughs of people sleeping
still deeply related
unknown to one another until last night

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What a night
My feet stick to the floor
A few streetlights
one by one
gradually unbloom
like stars covering themselves with dawn

and the ship has moved a half-mile off
now that daylight starts to find
a tin roof the shoreline the pier
then all the rest
But this is wonderful too
I tell myself

neighbors and warehouses and huge crates
how other people live
joined by a host of daily habits
separated only by mistrust
or is it the other way around
as it is with us

before last night brought us together
How quiet the house still is
An hour later I look up from my book
in an outburst of solitude
and the ship is so close
it darkens the entire window

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Peter Leight

The Business of Power

Even in Rembrandt's portraits,
they don't look like a ruling class,
and their wives are no less pronounced, prizing money not
blood, merit
rather than patronage, showcasing girth as though business

set a standard of living
they merely adhered to. Rembrandt
put them in chairs, money conversing with beauty, but
they're standing
(in the commercial sense) as exponents of the solvent,

if common, misconception,
that with their lumps, muffs, stomach folds,
pendant chins, unfinished outer layers, and the predilection
for airless, well-choreographed virtue one sees revealed

in their business-like poses
they are merely ordinary
and unremarkable citizens. Unlike the Celts, whose heroes
spent time in fields, they do their peril-averting and gi-

ant-killing in Amsterdam's
downtown, their obstacle-bypass
in numbered accounts that Calvin's Geneva conferred, and
conform
in the obvious ways. Having found that the means justifies

the means, and that persons are
a sort of ingenuous social
money, they mask their puissance and assume a cheapness
that ensures

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acceptability, creating a perceptual

market in sternness, plainness,
and flatness. And looked at from the
throneless power angle, business is beautiful indeed (this
is also the power to say what is beautiful,—though

sandwiched between scavengers
and black detectives, business men
manage to avoid both legwork and overexposure. Prefer-
ring a little of everything to much of less, a fashion

the Chinese dispensed with through
a standardization of wants,
business has come to serve as a substitute for inspira-
tion, which is too slow to pay, and supplies us with
Rembrandts

that reproduce their merchants
(without brush strokes) for home viewing.
They don't look like rulers, but with their funds, their
rents, and unrelent-
ing wives, they may be entitled to their own way of looking.

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Don Bogen

A Postcard from St. Petersburg

The best footman's good
at sweeping up your broken glass,
has a tear for every occasion, knows
the weather and has committed
several hundred indecipherable proverbs
to memory.
The best cook's
gruff, beats you out of the kitchen
with a wooden spoon, got
fat from sipping at the gravy and plans
to stay that way.
The best
groom's mute, with eyes like mournful
chestnuts.
The best butler
mumbles in his pantry, is large enough
to frighten off your unwanted guests, sips
vodka at New Year's and blinks
when your niece Vasilisa waltzes out the night
with the young officer
who will whisk
her off, doffing his hat to the serfs
as the troika flies to the old driver's
whip and they slide away into a future as safe
as snow.

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Phyllis Janowitz

Luncheon at the Marshalls

We are ten minutes late. They
are very sweet, hiding their
rage under pink sugar, a boiled

icing that pains the teeth.
We admire the latest blackened
addition to the ancestral

collection, a mustachioed toad
encased in a shroud of grease.
The aubussons are covered with dust.

Sweet satin, how I would like
to lie in all that money.
I'd know what to do with it.

They've had a pay toilet
for their guests installed.
It only costs a quarter.

Now the car with the chauffeur
has driven off without mother.
Again! The drawing room is

steeped in a drift of baby
dandruff. At least the baby has
stopped his lisps and gurgles.

They've resolved to have no
more of his kind in the house.
They'll put up a sign saying

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"Rich People Live Here"
and ask their guests to bring
their own refreshments or go

hungry. At the picnic table
we open our box of Kentucky
Fried Chicken. A cloud

resembling a eunuch watching
a harem watches us eat.
The sky darkens. The hounds

hang around, whining, begging.
Their ribs are showing.
A cold drizzle sifts down.

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Phil Boiarski

Dziadek

When he came home from the mines,
he went through the cellar; stripped
off his blackened work-clothes
and scrubbed away the day's coal dust.

I would see him under the shower,
his body, bent and white as a mushroom.
His face, neck and hands were black.
His eyes were bloodshot and ringed in white.
He stared hard at the heap of his empty garments.

Every evening, if there was sun,
he went straight to the barn, his head still wet.
Worn handmade tools, arranged according to uses
and seasons, hung on wood walls.

He spat on his stone and sharpened
his hoe, shovel or husking knife;
stroked his curved scythe's dark
steel edge to silver. Each handle, carved for his hands,
moved its blade to his purpose.

He raised a new set of stains under the arms
and down the backs of clean blue shirts.
I said to him once, "I would hate to take
two baths." My Dziadek, my Grandpa said,
"This sweat is mine, I will sleep in it."

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Two Poems by Pamela Miller

The Speedreader

His method is published in a pamphlet.
Turning pages so quickly he resembles
some complicated threshing machine,
in dark gray suit and a sickly tie,
his bald head gleaming
like an ice rink,
he has read forty books in three hours,
including a dozen popular novels
and a difficult treatise on the bone structure of birds
some eight hundred pages in length.
His football-shaped glasses
continually
slip down his nose: he either squints above them
or prods them back up with a fingertip.
The finished books are stacked on the floor
like a tower of abandoned apartments.
His method is published in this pamphlet:
he sees each word
as a desert island, equipped
with one tall palm
and two shipwrecked men in tattered clothes,
and as the men
shake hands, he reads the sentence in the space
between their fingers. Eventually, the men
will starve to death, and he
will be seen in parks, pathetic,
turning the cheesy pages of a movie magazine
as slowly as the descent of a glacier.

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Fats Domino's Parents

Fats Domino's parents each
wear a gold ring—each,
the woman, the man. A slice of hard moon
captured and bound down.

They are accomplished
pool players. Mama makes the smoothly colored
balls scuttle like
distracted beetles in the sun. Papa
strokes the cue wickedly, calculating distances
and possibilities.

For the visitors, a table
is crammed with food—chicken
with okra, spices: as hot as New Orleans
itself. Pale, cool drinks for these
clustering visitors; the glasses tall,
fully elegant.

"Is this his piano?" squeaks a
long woman. Papa touches
it as if the keys were carved
from his own body. As
they leave now, he looks shy, but Papa
is not shy. Has never been shy.

Mama pulls him down, now they
are gone, she pulls him down,
sweetly and all the way down. They stay
there; clock says four. They stay
pressed together, watching
their shadows sweep the walls.

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Two Poems by Brenda Nasio

batik maker

for jodi and rich
(approaching autumn in
bryantown, maryland)

in the kitchen after cutting
she tapes muslin to the paneglass
sliding door with the northern exposure
over drawings to be transferred
in number two pencil
then tacks the fabric by hand
to stretcher strips

(on the stove a pot of watercress
and potato soup warms)

and applies the melted wax with
tjanting tools to the places where
the dye is not meant to go
she mixes scarlett and brown and
yellow into tubs of water
and leaves the cloth to soak

after lunch the material is
rinsed and hung to dry from a line
tied between two trees where the
hothouse will be next spring

by evening when the wax has been
removed the batik is ready to be framed

and it is time for supper.

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missed signals

for barbara and bruce

we went there mostly in spring

to the house (which used to be a barn)
with a garden outside and
a free-standing tub upstairs
past the three bedrooms (the last one was mine)

the weather shifted in extremes and
we adapted
either sipping cups of tea
wrapped in thick sweaters curled up
on the rug or sunning ourselves
on the lawn sipping bloody marys
in our underwear (while bruce was in town)

in the afternoon we
would nap in rooms of antique
jars and lamps and needlepointed chairs
where the windows were sealed
with plastic against flies and
the wind stirred through places
loosely taped

once,
david and mary came along
with their dog, taffy, which we walked
for miles past farms uphill one
particularly hot day in may
coming back down we noticed
skins tied drying in a small shed

that afternoon while everyone else
(i thought) slept
i got up and found David

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on the couch downstairs
he asked me i could read his palm
i said it wasn't in my repertoire and
went the kitchen for a glass of
ice water puzzled and
embarrassed that mary might have overheard

later, i told barbara and
she just smiled

we didn't go there much in summer and
by autumn the house was sold

months later david called to say
we should have lunch and would i help him
with an article he was writing

he never called back and now lives in d.c.
with mary and taffy

bruce is in chicago and

barbara's in new york

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Vic Coccimiglio

Conception

He strikes a match and she strikes a match;
these first two
go out before they can light the candle
hanging from the ceiling.
They put them in the empty ashtray; smoke trailing
from their black heads
like two World War I fighter planes going down,
side by side, in an open field of brown grass.
She strikes a match and he strikes a match;
both fail. With their hands above the candle

they rub the thin wooden sticks
until there is one flame
atop the white headless wick. Together,
while removing the third and the fourth matches
they bring away a small piece of flame: It is
the head of their unconceived child
daring them to pull their hands apart.

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Two Poems by Ronald Wallace

At the St. Louis Institute of Music

When Mr. Croxford
flicked his skinny wrist,
and the metronome began
its slow tick in his throat,
I knew that I was lost.
My thick hands tripped and stumbled
over the deviant keys,
my sour stomach off-key,
out of tune.
Outside, the day grew taut,
the fall air thin as wire,
and his voice, that cracked
and raspy sounding board,
sent me home.

All week I'd hear him clicking
out in center field, as
bases loaded, I'd pop up.
Or in the lunchroom,
flirting with the girls,
I'd feel his thin wrist
measuring my tongue until
his cracked voice rasped me back
and there I'd be again, legs
dangling from the stool,
wishing I had practiced.

Until one day they caught him
in the washroom
in a stall with Porky Brown,
and my short unhappy practice sessions ended.
I can't say I wasn't glad, or that

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I felt much pity for him:
I made first string and several girls
and easily forgot him.
Yet, years later, safely married,
on days flat and diminished,
as I practice my profession
in the silence of my room,
I miss the crazy bastard.
And wish him back to abuse me
into song.

Extracting the Honey

Wrapped up in canvas, rubber, and gauze,
we walk out to the hive.
It is August, and hot.
The sun stings us through our thick gloves.
When we lift up the cover:
a brisk wind of bees.

We pry through the propolis
and loosen the supers.
All summer we have not talked.
We brush clean the sagging frames.

Back at the house
we slice the wax caps off
and crank up the extractor.
The honey flows, limpid and gold.

Our hands slick and sticky,
we strain out the bees' legs, feelers and fuzz.
We open our difficult mouths.
Now our tongues turn to honey.
For the first time all year we are
giddy with our sweet lives.

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name were one we should all know already. ' We've been

doing some reading together.'

I felt instinctively that the pyjamas were must belong to
Guggenbuhl.
Werner He was dark, and not bad looking in a very

German style, with a precise, irritable expression,

a little like Quiggin's.
Of Moscow ArtsTheatre we were talking,'
' he explained, in

a cold hard voice, as if our interruption was inexcusable,
he were insensitive
but all the same prepared to instruct even such stupid

people as ourselves,' Moscow Art Theatre has fully exercised
perhaps more
and permanent staff of five hundred persons, actors, singers, clowns,

craftsmen, designers, scene-shifters, all highly trained and

supplying themselves to make. Moscow Art Theatre will give

two years to have perfect one single production--if needed
three, four, five
so, years. At other moment fifty plays on fifty

successive nights it will make. It is a commune, a house
be getting
of serious workers one and all. It is not to make money, no.

What is fine, what is noble, that it makes. '

' Oh, yes, it's wonderful, isn't it ?' said Anne Sterney, 'I've

read about it. I can' think we we don't have a revolution

here and start something of the sort.'

' You would have a revolution here ?' said Werner Guggenbuhl,' So?

Then I am in agreement.'

An Anthony Powell Manuscript Page

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Photo: Fay Godwin

Anthony Powell

The Art of Fiction LXVIII

With the publication of Hearing Secret Harmonies, *Anthony Powell's long serial novel,* A Dance to the Music of Time, *will have reached its climax. And to judge from the reception accorded to previous volumes, the applause in the U.S.A. will be as loud, if not louder, than that which greeted the completion of the sequence in Britain. For like his contemporary, Evelyn Waugh, to whom he has often been compared, Powell has successfully bridged the Atlantic despite the uncompromisingly 'English' nature of his art.*

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Beginning with A Question of Upbringing *(1951), the twelve volumes of* A Dance to the Music of Time *cover some fifty years in the life of Nick Jenkins, who is, like Powell himself, a well-connected author and man of letters. But the novel is less about Jenkins than the metropolitan circles he inhabits. These circles overlap, so that men of action, socialites and artistic types are thrown together, the usual catalysts being their wives, mistresses or lovers. Observing the way these contradictory social groupings intertwine, and the bizarre human gyrations that result, Jenkins discerns a pattern dictated by the rhythm of life—hence the theme of the novel, which is that its characters, like the Four Seasons in Poussin's painting, are all engaged in a ritual dance to the music of time.*

Anthony Powell was born in 1905, the only child of a Regular Army officer whose family line dates back to a 9th century Welsh chieftain. After Eton (where he fagged for Lord David Cecil) and Balliol College, Oxford, he spent six years in publishing with Duckworths. This was followed by a short period scriptwriting for Warner Brothers and an unsuccessful attempt to find work in Hollywood.

In December, 1939, Powell was commissioned into the Welch (sic) Regiment and served with them in Ulster. Later he was transferred to the Intelligence Corps and spent the remainder of the war as liaison officer to various Allied contingents in the UK.

A regular contributor to the literary pages in the Thirties, Powell joined the TLS *in 1948 and was Literary Editor of* Punch *from 1952 until 1958. Always an enthusiast of painting, he has been a Trustee of the National Portrait Gallery since 1962.*

Although Powell owes his international standing to the Music of Time, *in British literary circles he has been a fancied runner ever since making his debut with* Afternoon Men *(1931). This, together with* Venusberg *(1932) and* From a View to a Death *(1933), forms a trio of anarchic social comedies distinguished by their laconic, matter of fact language.*

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Recalling the comparative ease with which he wrote the three early novels, Powell has attributed it to "a sort of lyrical flow" which had already begun to dry up by the time he reached Agents and Patients *(1936). This is certainly less immediate than its predecessors, but still recognizably in the same tradition. The real break comes with* What's Become of Waring *(1939), which ushers in the distinctive first person narrative, at once detached and inquisitive, that is the* Music of Time*'s hallmark.*

Temperamentally unsuited to writing fiction in wartime, Powell did however manage to devote odd moments during his leaves to researching a biography of the 17th century antiquary and biographer, John Aubrey. The result was John Aubrey and His Friends *(1948) and* Selections from John Aubrey *(1949). By then life was more or less back to normal and Powell regained his appetite for fiction. Two years later his massive retrospective began to unfold.*

In 1934 Powell married Lady Violet Packenham. Since 1952 they have lived at The Chantry, a grey limestone mansion in the West Country with its own fairly extensive grounds and a panoramic view of the Mendips. Powell likes to recall that the Victorian novelist, Helen Mather, devoted a whole chapter to the house in her bestseller, Coming Through the Rye. *But on the misty December afternoon I called there, a few days before Powell's seventieth birthday, it was difficult to visualize the little girls in bloomers playing cricket on the lawn that Ms. Mather describes.*

A stocky, slightly stooping figure with bushy eyebrows and neatly trimmed white hair, Powell greeted me wearing a maroon sweater and khaki twill slacks that had seen better days. We shook hands beneath The Chantry's Classical portico; and then, as time was limited owing to the infrequency of trains back to London, Powell ushered me straight into the sitting room, the walls of which were filled with books and ancestral portraits. Pride of place in this family gallery belongs to a distinguished relative of Lady Violet's, John Churchill, whose manly features are displayed above the mantelpiece.

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On being assured that I didn't mind cats—was actually rather fond of them—Powell picked up Flixie Fum, his pedigreed Burmese, and measured most of his length on the sofa. Throughout the interview, a little over two hours, he only stirred to feed the log fire. From time to time he would smooth his hair with a delicate, two-handed motion; otherwise he made no gestures.

In our correspondence Powell had warned me that while he was quite happy to discuss his writing, he would not talk in great detail about himself "as I need any material of that sort for the Memoirs I am writing." In point of fact the only time he applied this embargo was when I asked him to elaborate on his interest in, and possible experience of, the occult.

At about a quarter to five Lady Violet appeared with the tea. We then gossiped about Evelyn Waugh, Cyril Connolly and others of that ilk until the taxi I had ordered arrived. "Be sure to send me a copy of the mag," said Powell as we parted.

INTERVIEWER

Can we begin at the beginning. I believe your father's family were of Welsh descent.

POWELL

Yes. They hadn't lived in Wales for about a hundred and fifty years, but they were Welsh. And my father went into the Welch Regiment—but I think quite by chance: I don't think it had anything to do with the family's being Welsh.

INTERVIEWER

Do you feel Welsh yourself?

POWELL

I'm very interested in Welsh life and Welsh history. But I've only paid visits there—I've never lived there. But I am interested in what Wales was like and the sort of people they came from—that sort of thing.

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INTERVIEWER

Did the fact that you were an only child affect your development?—for instance, did it encourage you to read a lot?

POWELL

I don't think I realized at the time what a strong factor it was that one was an only child. But I have learnt since, because my wife comes from a large family and she is always pointing out that some comment of mine totally derives from an "only child's" point of view. But I don't think it really has anything to do with reading, because her family were always great readers too. In fact as a child I used to draw a lot—almost more than I read, though of course I read a great deal. That in a way was just the same in her family, so that side has nothing to do with it. But there is no doubt that only children do have very much their own point of view. Being an only child makes you less conscious at the start that there will be ferocious competition from others.

INTERVIEWER

I believe you had a fairly peripatetic childhood, too.

POWELL

Yes. We moved round as the Army always does: you're always being shunted round to different places. Before the First War we were living in London quite a long time because my father was a Territorial Adjutant there, and so my earliest memories were really of living in a perfectly peaceful way in London. Then we went to a place near Aldershot just before the war. And of course once the war started one was moving about all the time.

INTERVIEWER

I think Cyril Connolly said in *Enemies of Promise* that you were one of those who gained most from Eton because of the little you gave. Is this fair?

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POWELL

He mentioned several people* in that context, and I don't really see that we gave such a little. I should have thought that we gave just as much as he did, because his efforts were enormously ambitious. But of course I never met him there; he was just that amount older than me. I knew him by sight, and am indeed talking about that in my memoirs. But the point really was . . . there was this small group of people who were very interested in the arts and he was just that much higher up for it to have been a bit of a condescension to have been mixed up with us; but he just might have done if he'd been a rather different sort of person.

INTERVIEWER

Were you conscious of belonging to a very talented set who were all going to make their mark on the arts?

POWELL

It's very, very difficult to say. You see you just knew people as your friends with common interests and I don't know that anybody had much idea what that group were going to do. I think that when I got to Oxford a lot of people were pretty sure that Evelyn Waugh was going to do something, but I don't think anybody really knew about any of the others. Of course somebody like Harold Acton was a very famous and flamboyant figure as an undergraduate. But again, I'm trying to sort out all this in my memoirs and to be quite honest about it, it's exceedingly difficult to know what one thinks oneself quite often. I mean I thought that when I finished my first novel—having been extremely disciplined for twenty-five years—I'll just sit back and write a few stories one knew . . . but in point of fact I'm finding it extremely difficult to work out just what I do feel about all sorts of aspects of my life and the people I have known.

INTERVIEWER

It was easier, then, to write a novel than autobiography?

*Harold Acton; Robert Byron; Oliver Messel; Henry Green.

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POWELL

No writing is easy—it is merely different. You just have to approach it in an empirical way.

INTERVIEWER

Did you know Orwell at Eton?

POWELL

No. I don't remember meeting him until about 1942, when we became great friends.

INTERVIEWER

Did you contribute to that famous on-off magazine, *Eton Candle?*

POWELL

Yes, I did indeed: I did a drawing for it—not, I think, a very interesting one.

INTERVIEWER

You've described your time at Oxford as a melancholy period. Any particular reason?

POWELL

I think perhaps I may have exaggerated that. Of course a great many undergraduates do have rather gloomy moments, and I do remember my Oxford days as rather divided between being extremely rackety for certain periods and then sitting rather gloomily alone in one's room for a lot of the rest of the time. And I think to give it the short answer: in those days you really were totally prevented from seeing women in any form, and I do rather attribute it to that. Of course one might have got into much worse messes if women had been available. But looking back, I think that their absence undoubtedly contributed to my gloom a lot.

INTERVIEWER

When you were at Oxford, had you by then decided to become a writer?

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POWELL

No, not at all. And even after writing my first two or three novels I don't think I thought that I should necessarily settle down to writing. . . for it to become my life's profession. You see in London in those days practically every intelligent young man was writing a novel—it would have been inconceivable not to have been writing a novel.

INTERVIEWER

Surely that's an exaggeration. . . .

POWELL

No, I mean if you were the sort of young man who was interested in books and so on, you almost certainly were trying to write a novel. But I didn't start at Oxford. Now Henry Yorke* was a direct contrast to me: he always did want to be a writer, and had a novel published while he was at Oxford—*Blindness* came out then. In fact he began writing it at Eton. Of course everybody was a bit sceptical about what it was going to be like but he was quite undeterred by this. But I've no embarrassing juvenile works or anything like that. I never really seriously wrote anything until I wrote *Afternoon Men*.

INTERVIEWER

Is it true that working in publishing you learnt more about writing from reading bad manuscripts than from the classics?

POWELL

Yes, well that is a great theory of mine. I do think that if a book is really well written, it's terribly difficult to see how it's done. I think it's part of the mystery of writing that the real great hands always conceal how they do it. And an awful lot of bad writing is due to people trying to write like great writers and not really seeing that the outer covering has nothing to do with it at all.

*Henry Green

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INTERVIEWER

Were there any authors at that time who did have a great influence on you?—I think you've mentioned Hemingway.

POWELL

Well, I think one was very aware of this new sort of writing which Hemingway was the most obvious example of; but of course there were lots of others. There certainly was a feeling that writing had got to change, and I was quite interested in that. But it's awfully difficult to say who influenced one. I mean on the whole I would instance the French and Russians as being the people I admire, rather than any particular British writers.

INTERVIEWER

Which French and Russian writers?

POWELL

Well, I'm very fond of Stendhal and Dostoyevsky. . . .

INTERVIEWER

Lermontov too?

POWELL

Lermontov of course, yes. Really the whole lot of the Russian classics, although I'm a Dostoyevsky man as opposed to a Tolstoyan—

INTERVIEWER

Unlike Books-do-furnish-a-room Bagshaw!

POWELL

Yes, exactly!

INTERVIEWER

What about Balzac?

POWELL

Yes, very keen on Balzac. Indeed I'm reading *The History of the Thirteen* at the moment.

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INTERVIEWER

You've described your early writing as very lyrical.

POWELL

I think that's very true. When you're young you do have this curious fluency. I can remember that bits of dialogue used to come into my head when I was on a bus perhaps, and I would write them down on the back of an envelope—not in connection with anything. But I think you soon use up all that, although I must say that after six years in the Army I did find after the war that one had a lot of dammed-up stuff—even at that age: I suppose I was at the beginning of my forties.

INTERVIEWER

I think you were surprised at the reaction to your first novel, *Afternoon Men.*

POWELL

I was surprised that people thought it gave a savage, cynical view of life. I was simply trying to write a straightforward account of what a love affair in those days was like, but it was treated as an example of the younger generation being rather brutal.

INTERVIEWER

They took you for a satirist, like Waugh?

POWELL

Yes, well there's always been this thing of whether one's a satirist or not. I always think there's rather a difference between comedy and satire. I'd perfectly be prepared to come in on comedy, but I wouldn't *in general* say I was a satirist. Satirists really have an aim, I think. They usually have something they are attacking. But of course a certain sort of writing is very apt to be called satire always.

INTERVIEWER

Does *Afternoon Men* anticipate the *Music of Time?*

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POWELL

Well, a bit, yes. When I began writing *Afternoon Men,* it was going to have two sides to it, like the *Music of Time.* It was going to have what you might call the "pub-going" side and also a London Dance side too. But I found that the Dance side didn't seem to work, so I gave it up. In that sense—as regards planning—it anticipated the long novel.

INTERVIEWER

You've paid quite a generous tribute to Cyril Connolly in the Thirties as an advocate of young writers.

POWELL

Well, when he was on the *New Statesman* I think he was very good at pressing the claims of. . .well, people like Scott Fitzgerald, whom I really would never have heard of it it hadn't been for Connolly. I think he really was very good when he was first of all writing criticism, and almost to the end of his days I always found him worth reading. But I think he went up and down as to quite how valuable the stuff he produced was.

INTERVIEWER

Of course a lot of young English writers at that time were very committed—the "Macspaundays"* and so on.

POWELL

Oh absolutely, yes.

INTERVIEWER

Did you feel very out of step with them?

POWELL

Totally, totally. You see there was this moment when the whole of this sort of committed writing really completely took over, and it felt quite extraordinary if you were another sort of person.

*Amalgam of MacNeice, Spender, Auden and Day Lewis.

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INTERVIEWER

Was it easier for young writers to make a living then?

POWELL

Oh, no, I should have thought it was much easier now. There were extremely few outlets. I mean unless you managed to bring off a success. . . things like doing odd jobs for the BBC or the British Council or whatever were far more difficult to get in those days. And literary journalism, too, was much thinner on the ground I should have said.

INTERVIEWER

What made you turn to scriptwriting?

POWELL

Well, again, in those days it was a natural progression: you wrote a novel or two, became a scriptwriter, and then if you were lucky, went to Hollywood and cleaned up there. And after I'd written three or four novels my agent came along and said, "I can get you a job with Warner Brothers." And since I was at a completely dead-end by that time with Duckworths, I switched over.

INTERVIEWER

Did you like scriptwriting?

POWELL

No, I absolutely *loathed* it—admittedly it was a very low form of scriptwriting—but I really couldn't have disliked anything more. And then there was rather a slump over here in the movie business, and so we went to Hollywood via Panama—

INTERVIEWER

You were married by this time?

POWELL

Yes, I was married in 1934 and they were just preparing a

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film called *A Yank at Oxford,* and my agent thought it might be possible for me to get in on that. Well, we arrived in Hollywood, and as I've said before, the only interesting thing was that we did meet Scott Fitzgerald who was working on *A Yank at Oxford.* Otherwise, one just tagged round and saw a few people, but I never got a job there. Again, you must remember that when you're that age you don't know all sorts of things you learn later on. Now my plan was to work there for about a year, earn as much as possible and then come home. But now I realize this would have been very difficult to do. It's much more likely that like Fitzgerald one would have been sucked into this really appalling machine and spent the rest of one's life working night and day in order to maintain a hideously expensive standard of living.

INTERVIEWER

So in retrospect you're pleased you didn't get a job?

POWELL

Well, yes. . . I mean I don't think I was cut out for it anyway—it's one of those special talents, writing for the movies, and sometimes the most unexpected people can do it. But I don't think I had any talent for it at all.

INTERVIEWER

And you've never really alluded to this Hollywood episode in your novels?

POWELL

No, that again is slightly interesting in that you'd *think* it would be but you really never know what things are going to be suitable material for books. And for some reason I've never thought it was suitable material.

INTERVIEWER

Perhaps you didn't stay there long enough?

POWELL

Well, I don't know. I mean one does other things for an

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even shorter time and you use them. It's a total mystery why certain things and certain incidents in your life seem to go into this material which you can use, and others don't. In fact I did write an account of meeting Fitzgerald which appeared over here in the *Times* and in America in a thing called *The Scott Fitzgerald and Hemingway Annual* in 1971.

INTERVIEWER

So after Hollywood you came back and knuckled down to . . . what?

POWELL

Well, I came back and messed around with journalism and that sort of thing, and then before one knew it, it was pretty well the war.

INTERVIEWER

I suppose your last pre-war novel, *What's Become of Waring,* is stylistically the forerunner to the *Music of Time.*

POWELL

It is in that it's told in the first person, which I hadn't done before. What I always feel about it when I reread it is that although it's a fairly frivolous book, it does communicate an extraordinary feeling of nervous tension . . . of the war coming, in a rather indefinable way.

INTERVIEWER

I felt that Eustace Bromwich was a definite prototype of one of my favorites in the *Music of Time,* Dicky Umfraville.

POWELL

Yes, you're absolutely right about that.

INTERVIEWER

Bearing in mind that you were thirty-three when war broke out, did it ever occur to you not to join up?—after all, you could probably have got into the Ministry of Information or

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something like that.

POWELL

No, no . . . I should have felt frightfully out of it if I hadn't have managed to get into one of the Services somehow.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have a particular attitude towards soldiers and soldiering?

POWELL

Well, having been brought up with it really all round one, I've always found a certain fascination in it. But I had quite enough of it during the war . . . although from the point of view of doing the sort of soldiering I did in the War Office, I'd *far* rather do that than I'd be in the movie business, for instance.

INTERVIEWER

There seem to be quite a few eccentrics among your soldiers, beginning with Major Fosdick.

POWELL

Well, there are quite a lot of eccentrics in the Army, you know . . . they *abound*, eccentric soldiers.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think the war was a good thing as far as your work was concerned? I mean, was it a good thing to have had that break?

POWELL

Well, again, I simply don't know. The fact that it was an extraordinary break is undeniable. There it was: one simply did not write anything for six years. And what's more, I simply could not have done any writing during the war. Again, it's very interesting how different people react, because of course

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Evelyn Waugh was really perpetually writing on and off. I, of course, had a totally different sort of war from him, but even supposing there'd been moments where I'd been completely laid off, I don't think I could conceivably have done it.

INTERVIEWER

It seems to me that the war adds a lot to the *Music of Time:* all those "violent readjustments" Nick refers to.

POWELL

Yes, well it really was a great upheaval, and one came out of it as quite a different person.

INTERVIEWER

Did your career more or less match that of Nick's?

POWELL

In the war it did, yes. The account of the Army in the war is *fairly* autobiographical—really I would say much more than the rest of the book. You see if you go to a certain regiment and you're moved up to a certain division and so on, well, you give a kind of projection of that, but you invent up to a point, too. And of course once I was in this really quite small section of the War Office, a great deal of the stuff inevitably had to be autobiographical because you really couldn't transpose it as regards a story. Most of it is purely background for the things that are happening in the book, but the description of dealing with the Czechs and the Poles and so on really was like that.

INTERVIEWER

When did you decide to do the book on Aubrey?

POWELL

Just before the war. Because I felt quite convinced that if I survived the war, I shouldn't be able to come out of the Army and sit down and write a novel, because you do need some sort of inner calm to write a novel—at least I do—and there-

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fore I did collect a fair amount of stuff on Aubrey before the war. Then during my leaves I worked hard on reading up all sorts of fairly obscure 17th century books which if you were in ordinary life you might feel were pretty boring, but which if you're in the Army make a refreshing change. So by the end of the war I had quite a lot of material, and this I worked up in libraries and such like places, which is what I describe at the beginning of *Books Do Furnish a Room.*

INTERVIEWER

Talking about that, is there any significance in the fact that Nick is supposed to be doing a book on Burton?—who also comes into the last volume.

POWELL

Well, the phrase "afternoon men" does come out of Burton, so he's been on my mind since then and I have really read him quite a bit. But it would be a terrific undertaking to write a book about him—he just stands for my book on Aubrey, really. But a very *serious* American scholar who was talking to me about all this said that Burton is not at all a suitable alternative because Aubrey is a man of life and Burton is a man of death. . . .

INTERVIEWER

Was there any particular reason why you settled on Aubrey?

POWELL

He was another chap I'd always been interested in, and oddly enough there simply was no book on him—well, there was a book that had appeared in 1840, but nothing since. And so that also seemed a rather good reason for having a go at it.

INTERVIEWER

Of course *Books Do Furnish a Room* is also about Fitzrovia.* Did you spend much time there?

*After the Fitzroy Tavern. A collective noun for the Soho pubs and clubs popular with Grub Street in the Forties.

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POWELL

A certain amount, yes. I've always been fairly familiar with that world. But although I knew certain people in it, there was also a great deal about it I didn't know, or only heard about at second-hand. Because as I think I say in the book, it was a very odd world: quite unlike anything before, and quite unlike anything after.

INTERVIEWER

Very much lived in pubs?

POWELL

Very much lived in pubs, yes. Although again, I'd done plenty of living in pubs in my early days, really.

INTERVIEWER

The late Forties certainly come across as a frightfully grisly period.

POWELL

It *was* a frightfully grisly period. I mean in certain respects it was almost grislier than the war. London really was fearfully bleak then: everybody was tremendously tired, and there was nothing to eat and jolly little to drink, and then we had that terrifically cold winter of 1947 when all the bathwater froze up. . .all most unpleasant.

INTERVIEWER

Was it about now that you began work on the *Music of Time?*

POWELL

Yes. Aubrey came out in about 1948, and that really did seem to do the trick. I was ready to write fiction again.

INTERVIEWER

Can you describe the genesis of the *Music of Time?*

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POWELL

Well, this is rather a long story. You see I haven't any great talent for inventing plots, and indeed it seems to me that even the best writers are inclined to churn out the same stuff in eighty thousand words, although it's dressed up in a different way. And so I thought that there would be all sorts of advantages for a writer like myself to write a really long novel in which plots and characters could be developed which would cover this question of not doing short-term plots—doing rather larger ones, in fact. But of course I didn't know at the beginning quite how long all this was going to be. . . . I knew there would be a great number of novels, and about, I suppose, half way through I realized that I should have to do at least three about the war. Well, having done six before, it seemed the obvious answer to do three to end it up with, because I think it's quite a good idea to have some sort of discipline imposed on yourself in writing, and therefore I deliberately wrote the last three with the idea of ending it up and doing the neat twelve volumes. But I have to admit that in 1951 I didn't know there'd be exactly twelve.

INTERVIEWER

When you first considered doing a long novel, did it occur to you that this might be rather a gamble?

POWELL

Yes, I think that is perfectly true. I think that really until the last page of the last volume was finished one never knew whether one was going to be able to bring it off, you see. You always have this terrible feeling, "Am I going to dry up?" Apparently Kipling felt the same: he never got up from his chair without feeling that he was never going to be able to write another line.

INTERVIEWER

How far ahead did you plan?

POWELL

That's a very difficult question to answer, because it's per-

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fectly true that you set out in advance with a certain number of characters, but as they do different things, inevitably you have to trim your sails to what they've done, just as you do in real life. And I think that if the book has any vitality, it's due to recognizing this fact: that if you've got your character right, then up to a point what he or she does is fairly logical. . . . But of course as you advance with your book, you're advancing on a wider and wider front, and there are all sorts of things that have to be taken into consideration. And I wouldn't for one moment suggest that it was easy to correlate all that, but in that does consist the hard work of writing a long novel.

INTERVIEWER

Did you keep a card index?

POWELL

I made one on the first volume, but it was such hard work that about half way through the second I concluded that if I had the energy to write a card index, I really had the energy to write the book. So that was that.

INTERVIEWER

Has your wife helped at all?

POWELL

She's got a very good memory. And if you say, "What would somebody be wearing in 1936 if they were going to a party in a museum?" or something like that, she's very good at saying "I think it would be so and so. . . ."—things of that sort.

INTERVIEWER

Does she ever comment on your work in progress?

POWELL

No, not really. But she always reads the manuscript at the end, and will make a few suggestions—usually of a fairly

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practical nature. For instance, "Doesn't this possibly contradict a previous passage. . . . ?" She's also very helpful if I say, "Two people are arriving on a doorstep; I just want a bit of delay. What would they suddenly have begun to talk about?" . . . that kind of thing.

INTERVIEWER

Getting back to the business of characters. Do you find that they suddenly acquire a momentum of their own?

POWELL

Oh, I think that is certainly so. And the image I always use for that is that you've got three people playing Bridge, and for a matter of convenience you bring in a figure called Snooks to make up a four, and Snooks suddenly takes over and you find that the thing's totally run away with you. That of course is a very crude way of explaining it, but you are finding that happening all the time.

INTERVIEWER

Coincidence plays a large part in determining the pattern of the Dance—too large a part, according to some critics.

POWELL

Well, I think in human life it happens a *thousand* times more than I would ever dare bring it in, and I could mention the most extraordinary coincidences that have actually taken place in my own life. But yes, I think one does have to be careful about not using it too much simply because people do think it *is* unconvincing.

INTERVIEWER

Can you give an example of coincidence in your own life?

POWELL

Well, yes, this is a perfectly straightforward one: When my father was sent in 1924–5 on a military mission to Finland, I

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went out there for two Oxford vacs. And there was a family we knew there whose daughter I used to dance with occasionally. Well, about ten years ago, when our younger son wanted to go to Spain and learn Spanish, the Spanish wife of a friend of ours' recommended a place which we wrote to, and they wrote back and said No, they couldn't take him, but they could recommend somebody else. Well, when he went there it turned out that the head of the family was married to this girl I used to dance with in Finland. It's not a bad one, is it really? But if you put that in a book it would be considered absolutely absurd. I mean, there's no particular tie-up in it: you can't say, "Oh well, naturally everybody was interested in books or paintings or something. . . ." It was just *sheer, extraordinary* coincidence. . . .I mean there was no *earthly* reason why she should have married a Spaniard.

INTERVIEWER

Are there any definite stylistic influences you could name in respect of the long novel?

POWELL

Not, I think, conscious ones. Again, I rather feel that the less writers are always examining themselves in that sort of way, the better. I don't think you ought to be thinking, 'Well, am I writing like this? or writing like that?' I think you just want to try and write as well as you can. It's above all a question of *instinct.*

INTERVIEWER

Could we just settle the comparison to Proust? I believe you reject it?

POWELL

Well, I do to this extent: That I'm a great admirer of Proust and know his works very well. But the essential difference is that Proust is an enormously subjective writer who has a peculiar genius for describing how he or his narrator feels.

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Well, *I* really tell people a minimum of what my narrator feels—just enough to keep the narrative going—because I have no talent for that particular sort of self-revelation. Like movie-writing, it's a very particular sort of talent, but people often speak as if every writer had it. You've only got to see the number of books in which people bore you to tears with very detailed revelations about their sex life to realize that this isn't so. Writing is only interesting if, to use a rather pompous phrase, the art is there. And certain people's sex life can be interesting if the art is applied to it, but unlike Proust, most of us aren't equipped to bring this off.

INTERVIEWER

Talking about your narrator, to what extent *does* Nick Jenkins share your literary and artistic tastes?

POWELL

Well, what I usually say about him is that he's somebody of my sort simply because it's much easier that way. Supposing, for the sake of argument, I wrote from the point of view of a surgeon. Well, I don't really know what a surgeon's life is like. And although I'd read it all up, I'd probably make some fearful howler about what it feels like. Therefore, having decided to do the thing in the first person, which in itself is a decision—you know one might have done it in other ways—I came to the conclusion that if you try and avoid what is roughly speaking your own point of view, it simply comes out another way. And so it's much simpler to write about someone who is roughly speaking the same sort of person, has roughly speaking had the same sort of life . . . but that doesn't necessarily mean that all the things that happen to him have happened to me.

INTERVIEWER

Well, I wasn't thinking so much about the things that have actually happened to him as perhaps the opinions he comes out with on books and paintings or whatever . . . .

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POWELL

Yes, well sometimes one uses him that way, sometimes one uses him as a foil to make somebody else say it, you see.

INTERVIEWER

What about that passage in *The Acceptance World* in which Nick broods on the complexities of writing a novel about the English—largely because of the intricacies of our social life? Were those your sentiments?

POWELL

I think they were. I've always rather felt that the Russians and Americans, for example, and to a certain extent the French, can throw somebody onto the canvas, so to speak, and everybody knows what they're talking about. . . . I think much more so than in England. I think here people have to be described much more—you do get these extraordinary variations.

INTERVIEWER

Did you have a definite reader in mind when you embarked on the novel?

POWELL

No, I think not at all. And again, I think that's rather the sort of thing I would prefer *not* to do. I do think one of the great troubles about writing is this business of being self-conscious. If you possibly can avoid being self-conscious about your writing, I do think it is ever so much better. And thinking my readers are so and so, and will they like this and will they like that—if you can avoid it, I think you want to.

INTERVIEWER

Was it a surprise to you that the novel has been so popular in America?

POWELL

Well, in a sense it *has* been a surprise. Again, as I think

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I've said before, the complaint that I sometimes get in England—that it's all rather esoteric and about a very small group of people—I don't get from America. And of course the thing that drives me absolutely mad—I just say it hasn't happened to me for a long time now—is to have an Englishman reviewing the book in America explaining that it's very difficult to understand. It really does absolutely send me up the wall, that; and it used to happen a lot in the early days.

INTERVIEWER

How did you react to Arthur Schlesinger calling you a Prosopographer?—which I think is someone who writes the social and intellectual history of a loosely connected group.

POWELL

Well, up to a point I would go along with that, because that again is a sort of literary device, and having once started writing that sort of book, you are really commited to going ahead with it. The only way you can get away is for example in the war, because then you genuinely do get away, and therefore what you describe is just as real as when everybody is apparently linked up. But I think that you don't want to do that artificially.

INTERVIEWER

I was struck by your use of Art in the novel—not just as a title theme, but also as a medium for putting people and events into perspective.

POWELL

Well, as I said before, I've always been very keen on painting, and known a lot of painters at one time or another and so on.

INTERVIEWER

So it was very deliberate?

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POWELL

Yes, it was quite natural to me, I think, to explain things in terms of paintings.

INTERVIEWER

Are there any other of the arts you're keen on?

POWELL

Well, I'm not musical, although again, at one time of my life I did know a lot of musicians. . . . I was a great friend of Constant Lambert's and through him met several other musicians. And then I knew the Sitwells, and through them got to know Willie Walton.

INTERVIEWER

The occult and its devotees crop up throughout the novel. Are you very interested in that, too?

POWELL

Well, not particularly. But in Edwardian times there was an enormous amount of interest in fortune-telling and that sort of thing, and I think you'll find that people like myself who were children in the years before the First World War were automatically familiar with it. And it so happens that I have also met quite a lot of people by chance who were interested in it. But really the point of it coming in at the beginning and coming in again at the last volume is the fact that nothing ever changes: that what is now dished up in a supposedly different form is really exactly the same as the thing one was familiar with as a child.

INTERVIEWER

At one point in *Books Do Furnish A Room,* Traphel says, "Human beings aren't subtle enough to play their parts. That's where art comes in." Was this meant as a riposte to all those people who've been trying to identify your characters with real people?

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POWELL

Well, I think to some extent, yes. . . . But—I can't remember whether I actually quote this—but at one point *Afternoon Men* was dramatized, very much to my satisfaction, by an Italian called Riccardo Aragna who actually did the dialogue for *The Millionairess*. And I always remember talking to him about actors and saying that there are certain things one never hears said on the stage. I mean nobody ever says, "Will you have a cigarette?" and then goes on talking. And he said, "Well, if you're used to the theatre, you do realize this: that there are certain things which human beings say which *no actor can say*." I think it's a rather interesting and good point. It did explain a lot. And that all links up with the business about art, you see. . . about it all having to be done.

INTERVIEWER

Of course you've written a couple of plays* yourself.

POWELL

Yes. It came about as a result of the adaptation of *Afternoon Men*. It's very intoxicating to hear your own dialogue spoken, and as I was rather stuck at that moment in a novel I thought I'd have a go at writing a play. And I wrote these two plays and both at different moments were absolutely at the point of being put on. Then as happens in the theatre things totally collapsed and there the matter rests.

INTERVIEWER

Do you mind if we consider Widmerpool now?—he does seem to hold an awful attraction for many readers.

POWELL

Well, I think he was always going to be a kind of focal point because if you're writing a very long book which has got to come out about every two years in a single volume you have got to have some terms of reference to keep the reader going.

**The Garder God* and *The Rest I'll Whistle* (Little, Brown).

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INTERVIEWER

So Widmerpool *was* a bait, then?

POWELL

He was a certain bait, yes. But he again I would have thought has grown. I mean earlier on you said, 'Do people take over?' I think up to a point one has to admit that Widnerpool has taken over. . . more perhaps to an extent than I would wish.

INTERVIEWER

Like Frankenstein's monster?

POWELL

Yes.

INTERVIEWER

Apart from Widmerpool, there are several other characters who are said to live by the Will: Barnby and Uncle Giles, for instance. Is this a preoccupation of yours?

POWELL

Well, yes, I've always been interested in people who do this. And of course one rather came across people in the war who carved out careers by just absolutely imposing their will, with nothing else behind it.

INTERVIEWER

Did you take a lot of time over getting the right names for your characters?

POWELL

Yes, I did. . . they can be an awful plague, names.

INTERVIEWER

One reviewer was rather critical of your naming characters after places. I think he cited Widmerpool, Leintwardine and Isbister.

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POWELL

Well, Widmerpool I got out of a 17th century book called *Colonel Hutchinson's Diary of the Civil War.* There's a Cromwellian Captain of Horse called Widmerpool who's described as being very parsimonious and generally sounded a rather disagreeable person, and I'd had his name down for really quite a long time as a name I was going to use. So as far as that goes it happened to be a place name, but it was also a name that was perfectly ordinary. Ada Leintwardine, which has been much pulled out as an unreal name, was again a name I came across in I think a sixteenth century document, and I thought it was such a good name that again I made a note of it. Isbister. . .it was Philip Larkin who brought this up, wasn't it? *(laughs)*. . . .well, Bob Conquest, who's a great friend of Larkin's, was very outraged by this and wrote to Larkin and pointed out that Larkin's a place name as well—I'm not sure he didn't find two Larkins, one in America and one here. Bob also discovered that the first man killed in the last war by a bomb was called Isbister. But I don't think I knew that Isbister was a place name, to tell you the truth.

INTERVIEWER

I think you've said that wit is very hard to preserve on paper. But in point of fact a lot of your characters *are* witty. Did this pose problems?

POWELL

I think it's perfectly true about some of the persons one's known who *really* are—or were—the wittiest and funniest of people. What they've said has totally gone with them because what's happened is that somebody's uttered a trivial remark and they've made some *wonderfully* funny comment on it. But somebody who wasn't there could only appreciate just *how* funny it was if you were to reconstruct the whole thing. On the other hand, there's less of a problem with people who've rather ground out aphorisms like. . .every fat man having a thin man trying to get out of him. That's very funny

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too, but it's a different sort of wit.

INTERVIEWER

Of course some of your characters are inclined to be pretty aphoristic, aren't they?

POWELL

I suppose they are a bit, yes.

INTERVIEWER

There are scarcely any children in the novel. Is this significant?

POWELL

Well, I think children are extremely difficult to deal with, you know. And I would generally avoid dealing with children simply because I haven't got the capacity. Very few writers have—though Gerhardie pulled it off in *The Polyglots.* The children in *The Polyglots* are brilliantly done. But I think most children in novels are embarrassing to a degree. I introduced them once or twice in my earlier pre-war novels, but I think not perhaps very happily. And again, as you work you get to know up to a point what you can do and what you can't do. . . and one rather steers clear of things one can't do.

INTERVIEWER

Remembering what you said earlier about writers and their treatment of sex, I think it's interesting the way you manage to introduce a very strongly erotic element, but do it elliptically.

POWELL

Well, I think that really is the only way you can do it. I mean I've no strong feelings about people giving detailed descriptions of people going to bed except I never really feel it's the right way to do it. Oddly enough, when I was in London yesterday I was passing a cinema and there was a still

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outside of a chap sort of *lying* on top of a girl. And I thought, Well, really, you know, I'm not sure that I really particularly want to see him *having* her. I think my own imagination would be better about that than him doing it. People are awfully odd about that. But I'm glad you think the erotic bits are erotic—one always hopes they are.

INTERVIEWER

I think Nick's first clinch with Jean in the car stands out. In fact I think their affair is one of the central things of the whole novel—more so than Nick's marriage to Isobel.

POWELL

Well, there again it's frightfully complicated, but clearly people *don't* tell you what their life with their wife is like if they're at all satisfactorily married. Therefore apart from any other considerations there'd be a great unreality in the narrator talking about this, you see. This is one of those instinctive things you've got to remember, I think, if you're writing a novel. You are simply telling a story and you want it to be convincing. Well, very often the greatest amount of detail is not the way to be the most convincing. After all, there's such a lot one goes through life not knowing when people are talking to you about something—you've got to guess and so on. And I think up to a point the novel wants to be like that too. You get stronger effects.

INTERVIEWER

Have your working methods varied much over the years?

POWELL

Not a lot. I really always, whenever I could, have worked all the morning. But in my early days I would quite often sit in front of a typewriter the whole morning without producing anything at all—it was not at all uncommon. Latterly I've got much more control as regards producing something, but one pays for that by not being able to do it later in the day. And

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when I was younger I found I could usually work all morning and then again after tea for an hour or so. But now I find that any serious work has got to be done in the morning, that I really am pretty well out for what you might call inventing anything after that, although I copy things out. My system is to do endless copies.

INTERVIEWER

Did your move down here from London lead to any great readjustments in your routine?

POWELL

Only insofar as the telephone became less intrusive. I mean the trouble about living in London is that you are an absolute martyr to the telephone if you work in the morning. You get the odd phone call here, but on nothing approaching the amount and scale. I do know people with strong enough nerves to take their receiver off or just let it ring, but my nerves have never been up to that. And what used to happen in practice was the telephone went and you answered it and it was a friend and before you know what the whole morning was gone.

INTERVIEWER

What about parties in London? Did you go to many?

POWELL

Oh yes, I think that's also true. Inevitably one went out more, although I don't think that particularly matters when you're younger—I mean unless you live it up tremendously. I think it's perfectly reasonable to go to a few parties and still be able to write novels, in fact I think it's perhaps quite a good thing, even.

INTERVIEWER

I believe, though, that you've never been able to work after having a drink.

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POWELL

No, absolutely. That goes for now, too. I like feeling very sort of after-breakfastish and it's a business morning rather. But I couldn't work after dinner—I mean some people work all night. I couldn't attempt to do that.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have any hobbies?

POWELL

Well not really, no. I sort of potter about in the garden, but I'm really rather hobby-less to tell you the truth. And of course I find now that one's older, one does sort of *work* all the time. I'm really frightfully bored if I don't work.

INTERVIEWER

Do you still do any reviewing?

POWELL

Yes, I do two pieces a month for the *Daily Telegraph.*

INTERVIEWER

You don't find it a chore?

POWELL

On the contrary, I find it extremely stimulating. I get two really pretty serious books a month—and I must say they're extremely good at trying to give me something that I like—and I really think it's rather good for you to have to review, say, a book about the organization of the Roman Army in the first half of the month and then the life of Christina Rosetti in the second. So far from being bad for you, I think it's very *educative* and it really makes your mind work. In fact, as I said before, I'm really rather lost now if I *don't* have something like that that I've got to do. . . .But of course there *are* demoralizing forms of literary journalism, and I've done my stint of reviewing five novels in a column and so on. You know how it is: your friends say, "Are you mad saying this

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terrible book is quite good?'' But you can't week in, week out keep saying this is all absolute rubbish.

INTERVIEWER

Do you read much modern fiction now?

POWELL

Not a great deal...V.S. Naipaul: I'm very fond of his books—he's rather a friend. And Kingsley's books. Roy Fuller I think's a good novelist. I've said this dozens of times and it never gets put in, but I think that Kingsley Amis is underrated as a poet because of his famous novels, and I think Roy Fuller is underrated as a novelist because of his famous poems.

INTERVIEWER

Harking back to what you said about the importance of work in your life, did you experience a sense of anti-climax when you'd finished the *Music of Time?*

POWELL

Well, it's extraordinarily like coming out of the Army in that after six years one is exceedingly glad to come out. But on the other hand you felt very lost...and I think up to a point I did feel that immediately. Now I'm really feeling rather calmer about it...and of course I have got these memoirs to knock into shape as well.

INTERVIEWER

One last question: In the introduction to *John Aubrey and His Friends*, you put the *Lives* into perspective like this: 'To the question, ''What are the English like?'', worse answers might be given than, ''Read *Aubrey's Lives* and you will see.'' ' Would you be happy with this as a verdict on the *Music of Time?*

POWELL

Yes, I think I would, I think I would....I did actually say

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in my book on Aubrey that it's not inconceivable that he might have been a novelist if he'd lived at a different date because he obviously had a lot of novelist's characteristics. But on reflection I don't think he probably had the staying power: you do have to have enormous staying power as a novelist. You've got to do a lot of very boring things over a long period, and if you can't do that, all the imagination in the world is no good.

INTERVIEWER

A question of guts?

POWELL

Yes, it is really I think rather—like almost everything else in life.

—MICHAEL BARBER

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The Skyjacker

Anthony Valerio

> The United States marine who staged the world's longest and most spectacular airplane hijacking—from California to Rome—was captured early today by a policeman who tackled him outside a chapel where he had sought refuge.
>
> The arrest, culminating a manhunt by 250 policemen using helicopters and police dogs over the Appian countryside, touched off urgent discussions between Italian and American authorities contesting the right to try him on criminal charges. . . .
>
> *New York Times,* November 2, 1969

Rome

To get a circumcision in Italy is a major operation. For example, if you are born in the General Clinic in Bologna, the gynecologist will not do it. You have to go to Florence. The Italians are a type who if they cannot find what they are look-

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ing for in one store they go no further, especially if it means they will not die. I plan to tell the Italians about themselves.

"Come in, Pasquale, come in. The lasagna is good. Did you make it?"

"My wife Sylvana made it but my daughter Anna brought it over on her bicycle."

Pasquale is not a pilot. When I learned I was to be imprisoned in a cell overlooking the Tiber, I pleaded with the officials at the airport to at least provide me with a jailer who was a pilot. Then we could talk like pilots about the sea, and that would almost be like being imprisoned overlooking Fuimicino with a jailer who wasn't a pilot. A sailor, let's say.

But Pasquale and I understand each other. He was chosen because of this. He speaks a broken-down English and Italian. I am supposed to understand. As far as this is concerned, the Americans and the Italians are on equal footing. I did not understand much of the English in Seattle. My father always spoke of Italy in Italian-American and I assumed that what I didn't know about the language amounted to what I didn't know about the country itself. Michelangelo and Mussolini are dead. No language barrier. David, from what I've seen of him in pictures, is not of a mind to say much, and Mussolini's son is a piano player. Leonardo is alive though. He is floating on the Tiber face down. He is disgusted. America had no Leonardo five hundred years ago. Cochise wasn't even born then, nor was Spiro Agnew. Yet Alitalia has fewer planes than TWA. Leonardo is my friend or else he would not have given me his plane. It's a lovely vehicle, my plane. Designed by Leonardo, the wings and tail are made of colored cellophane, red and yellow, with a wire crank on the underside to wind the rubberband. The rubberband is encased in a plastic contraption.

A wave of exhilaration runs through me, settles in my cheeks. I break off from the wall and go to the threshold of light and shade. I am flattered. No man has ever stared at my circumcision this long.

"If you like, Pasquale, I'll put on my Bermuda shorts. Just bring them to me. Won't you join me in a glass of wine?"

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The wine is the point to dally on. The wine is his. Apparently he has no circumcision. He is overdressed, jacket, vest, underclothes. A man in my position has nothing to take for granted. How I worry! I am being forced to take steps I do not want to. And where to sleep? There is no bed. Sleep on the desk, in the chair, scribble away in your delirium. We want you to never close your eyes. It's true that when I sleep my eyes are calmed. I am infatuated with infinity. I see there my next victim. When one becomes as proficient a killer as I am, he doesn't take into account the personality of the victim. One detail is all you need and bang! a kill. For this detail a small amount of time is required, a few minutes or so, if the man is talking. I'm being paid to be a criminal and I'm making the best of it. With Pasquale it's his infatuation with my circumcision. His head is leaning against the bars, his eyes turned downward. He may be sleeping but for all I care he is concentrating on my circumcision. If he is not, I will bring it about. That's my plan. In his position I could flail his skull to smithereens with it, it's that big a circumcision.

"Wake up, Pasquale. Look, I'll give you part of the royalty and with it you can buy a plane for your daughter. Do you know how much lasagna you can pack into a plane? So please come in . . ."

I need Pasquale. I need all the friends I can drink. Pasquale will drown in the Tiber. I have a few extra thoughts about killing him. No bed . . . I may swallow my eyes, go blind! No, that would be a worse fate than knowing everything. "I just want to see my father, Pasquale, then I'll let you go."

You cannot lure a man with what he knows or thinks he knows. Ambush. And look where I'm supposed to relieve myself! A bidet! I squatted over it and was titillated! I see. . . . Pasquale is to be my companion. Let a man stew in his own juice long enough and he will masturbate, and masturbators develop a strong tie to their fellow men.

"Are you circumcised, Pasquale?"

"I have bad news for you, Joseph. Your father came up from Naples to see you. He was very sick, as you know. He's in

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Queen of the Heavens Hospital. He saw your picture in the papers, he wants to see you."

Pasquale, my jailer, pushes the door open gently, walks over to my desk and pours himself a glass of wine. For his part he has established communication. Now there remains my part. He is confident, sits down, carves himself a square of lasagna.

"I want you to know how grateful I am to you for taking my feelings into account. When I first saw you at the airport I knew you were the one who would understand."

When you are a ward, no matter what you say or how you say it, you are not heard. The boss is moved by one thing and one thing alone, violence, then for sure the ward is doomed.

I was captured at Fuimicino, the major airport of Italy. I landed on a corner of the runway, out of the way of the Alitalia jetliners. I was turning my plane over to rewind the rubber-band, breathing in deeply the Italian air that my father said would uplift my spirit (my grandfather had told my father that the air in Rome and the air in Naples are the same; only the air in Sicily is different)—I was busy being exhilarated by my first touch with Italy, calm, having minutes before landing shit into the Italian thin air, when I was handcuffed, my plane taken away and put into a black leather bag. Only the mouth moved, like a fish.

What a welcome! The officials were dressed the same way, suits, coats, unusually wide shoulders, mustachioed, sipping coffee with their pinkies, flowers in the lapel, standing one behind the other, the heftier and taller in front. The wind was blowing in strong gusts as it does at all the airports of the world in November, but the wind had no effect on their eyelids. They kept staring, their feet glued to the ground they were standing on. Should I take the first steps? After all, I was the foreigner. I took half a step, their eyes moved a fraction of an inch. "Don't worry, paysans, I don't go anywhere without my plane." The first in line frowned, leaned his head back to who was to become Pasquale. "Che?" the official asked. The gun was pointed between my eyes while their eyes were pointed at my circumcision. "You are under arrest," the first official

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said. "Charged with air piracy, kidnapping, and interference with commercial air traffic. We are taking you to Queen of the Heavens Prison."

"Che?" I directed to Pasquale. If a third party understands the second, he invariably understands the first. However, in that wind and considering the sonic boom overhead, any reasonable translation was an extraordinary feat. I did not wait. These were my countrymen! Sooner or later their eyes would shift. Anyway, they were most likely under orders. The man in charge never comes to the airport at three in the afternoon in siesta countries. I went up to the official with the gun, put my arm around his neck. "Hey, paysan, thanks for welcoming me like this."

Pasquale is eating and drinking, telling me about how hard a life his wife has, old before her time, fat, anemic, rides over to the American sector on her bicycle, where she washes, cooks, dandles the students' children. They can't do it as well as she. She washes their dirty clothes by hand while she tells them war stories. They feel better and leave her their furniture when they graduate. I am one of those people who can think of more than one thing at the same time.

At the airport . . . You are all my paysans . . . I put my arm around each official but receive no acknowledgement. I start clutching them close to my chest. Can this be Italy? I am Joseph Esposito, I came to Italy to see my father. He's in Naples, I put down to rewind . . . I walked to the middle of the landing strip, sat down and cried.

Pasquale shouted over, "We are taking you to Queen of the Heavens Prison!" Riding on the wind his words broke apart and came to me in limping syllables. When I fly I can't distinguish words. What reaches the ear is syllables, as is only right. The real words are one syllable, two at the most. Noah was gravely mistaken, as was Adam. God had the right idea. It's Sunday afternoon, no time for a cell door to close behind you. St. Peter's is singing. Bells sound one at a time. We have only one heart. Hearts and words have this much in common, as they do with bells.

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Pasquale gets up, walks over to the cell window. He has grown used to my circumcision. Now we can speak. He tears down the purple cloth, the Easter fast is over, they're playing Cavalleria Rusticana at Caracalla. The maid cleans the debris from the table, Pasquale orders fifty more gallons of watered-down wine, two women from the nearest *vialle*. He came to a sudden realization while watching me eat. Pasquale is older than I am, befitting the jailer-prisoner relationship. The papers are right about my age, I'm twenty years old, which in my case may be an advantage: I'm close enough to the imbecility of childhood. I should sleep now but Pasquale has other plans. He is stirring, raising up on his toes to get a better look at something. I know all this without turning around. Whatever it is a man has to say is in the air well before he says it.

"Look, a ship coming up down the Tiber! Come see. It's no bigger than the smallest wave. The mainsail is red, white and blue. An elastic cord is tied to the dragon's neck, courses under the sail and is fastened to the dragon's tail. The hull rests on four cardboard waves. The deck is cluttered with brown sacks marked US MAIL! The sacks are moving! People are getting out, men and women. Oh, it's terrible, they're throwing themselves overboard, wailing. . . A beautiful blond woman, now a hefty one. The men are holding their own. A sack stamped Truman Capote is walking around with a petition requesting the captain to go slower, Norman Mailer won't sign. The sacks are around their feet, I see that much clearly, causing them to stumble. Jacqueline Susanne is laughing hysterically as she brings a hundred million men overboard with her. Her makeup comes off in the water and she disappears underneath. One sack reads Uncle Sal, do you know him? There are several unknowns on board. They're climbing on top of the dragon's head to survive. William Kuenstler goes into the barber shop, Abbie Hoffman cuts off his nose. A priest takes off his Bermuda shorts and starts humping the deck. Agnew, dressed in an aviator's uniform, is adding poison to the dough, which the blind cook is bravely pounding. A richly dressed black man is giving away money with one hand and

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counting out change for Agnew with the other. David Brinkley is trying to say something, runs out of breath. Chet Huntley is being fitted for contact lenses. The last Kennedy closes the bank door. They're calling you, Joseph! The ship is coming this way!

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Three Poems by Tom Disch

The Problem of Safety: a Manifesto

The raison d'etre of much
Aestheticism, as of
the entire hermetic tradition
in modern art,
from Symbolism to
the enigmas of minimalism,
has been the need to conceal
one's true feelings and opinions,
the expression of which
in any directer mode
would have lead to scandal
and ostracism. Rossetti
disguised his lusts
in the tinsel of an un-
believed-in religion,
while Freud wrote his poems
in the form of treatises.
Both wished to avoid
the ready comprehension
of their enemies.
Early in their craft
all poets learn to
hide their meanings
even from themselves.

So all this talk, since Whistler,
about the primacy and purity of
Form is balderdash.
No form is pure
that takes its shape
in the eye of an impure

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beholder, while to the pure
all forms are pure, and so
we needn't be
too particular.
We can take the first
form that comes along.

I would produce further
examples, but they would only
lead us, needlessly, from the
broad Middle Way
of generality into a
thicket of qualifications.
Few good artists
are such fools
as not to provide some
hints as to what they're doing
and why the room must stay dim
while they're at it.
But, you may say,
you like bright rooms!
That, these good artists reply,
betrays the weakness of
your equipment,
not theirs. And so the French
go on for centuries
living in their crepuscule
salons.

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The trouble with imagination
is that it won't settle down
with a single point
of view. It can always be seduced
by some likely paradox.
It sees how easily
a round dome may be placed
upon a square support.
And it loves
to hear itself talk.
as much as any
child at play
who tells his toys
to sit, or sing, or squawk.

The Ocean

One only needs to give the ocean some thought and it becomes describable as a street of houses:

To point out the features of the waves one has observed, or that one may imagine having observed; such as, that this moves forward with the curve of a woman's slackly muscled upper arm, when flexed, while the next displays a broader sweep that seems to amend or qualify the message of the first;

To proceed, then, to those more extensive forms invisible to viewers stationed on the shore, knowable only to those who make their home upon it, as the varying convexities of hills are known to the feet of their inhabitants, not to the racing eyes of truckers on the turnpike far away—to the swells, their endless amassings and fallings away, their seeming immensity;

To agree, nevertheless, that on a truly oceanic

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scale such forms, the largest apprehensible to sense, count for less than a wrinkle on the ocean's smooth bright face; that to the moon, which is their proximate cause, nothing changes on that face as it for ever turns and turns away;

Let us confine ourselves, on this account, to our own sphere of vision, wherein all analogies are, literally, home-spun—as though our theme had been, in fact, a street of houses, for what can be said of streets or houses on a global scale except that their number must be immense and their extent unthinkable? Returning, therefore, to our station on the shore, let us admire the colors that a given moment, at a given height, may yield:

The fissioning, amoebic blues and greens that lull the inattentive fisherman, defeat the wistful watercolorist;

The almost-blackness interleaved with these;

The skein of jittery white lines that seem raw light, quanta all but broken loose (these few threads remaining) from accidents of form and color;

And, ah! the rose enamalings of sunset, the fleshy washes of dawn when all ocean has become one single worshipful limb demanding to be mythologized;

And *then* the dance among these basic possibilities, each curve of wave engendering, in conjunction with an angle of the light, some necessary and sufficient charm;

But beyond charm there is utility: let us, accordingly, appraise the ocean's varied uses, as:

That it supplies our stores with fish (concerning which we might here intercalate heroic catalogues of their generic types, together with vast menus suggesting how each may best be cooked and dressed);

That it provides a unique, convenient form of transportation and a bridge broad enough for entire cultures to cross without colliding, as land-neighbors do (though not unfailingly: witness the sequence from Pearl Harbor to Hiroshima);

Progressing beyond utility, it would be well to note the ocean's often dangerous periodicities, its rip-tides,

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whirlpools, tsunamis, hurricanoes, and grand bashings of waves on cliffs;

A proper appreciation of which, in even their simplest forms, will require some knowledge of the ocean's inner mechanisms, the liquid clockwork ordering its waves, the ponderous hidden forms of streams and currents;

And now, finding ourselves, as it were, immersed, we may choose to observe the simple, satisfying destinies of all its denizens, which are, amazingly, not merely warm ovals of food on our round plates, but living beings supremely capable of, well, swimming anyhow, and of being anthropomorphized and, thereby, loved (though never, it must be allowed, to the degree our fellow mammals may be loved, since fish are such *egotists*);

Let us, at last, say what may be well-surmized of the ocean's obscurest depths, and speculate about its origins, which must be, in a sense, our own.

Do this, and the ocean that will then exist within your mind will be a worthy brother to the ocean you surveyed a year ago from its pebbly and often so-expensive shore,

On which the light played with such virtuosity,

In which you swam until you had become too cold.

Just Before the Cops Arrive

Something terrible has happened
but I don't know what. The letter
that arrived this morning will say no more
than that another letter containing the bad news
is on its way. It is something so terrible,
apparently, it can't be named.
Humiliating too, I have no doubt.
Today is Saturday. There won't be

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another delivery of mail
till Monday morning at eight o'clock.
For one weekend, then, I shall live
the life of an escaped convict, getting
steadily more drunk and more hilarious
as the dragnet closes in.
Sister Fidelis used to ask what we would do
if we knew the world was definitely
coming to an end in the next half-hour.
High-tailing to church was not the right answer.
The thing to do, according to Sister Fidelis,
was to continue, unfluttered, at one's usual task.
Surely she was right. What better way to let God know
that one's conscience is clean? And mine—is it?
I believe so. Yet there is, for all that,
a sense of fitness to this nebulous but nevertheless
quite massive bad news, a feeling of
predestinate necessity that has less to do
with the symmetries of retribution
than with the fact that bad news is
ultimately inescapable. No matter
that we've reached another state, we're still
wanted men, on display at every jerkwater
post office. The letter may not arrive Monday.
A compassionate typist may have misaddressed it.
But even if I should never read it, even if
I should run away to Argentina, where they kill
anyone who prints bad news, it would still be there,
in its blue envelope, my own terrible truth.

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Portfolio

From *None*

Richard Prince

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THE AUTHOR

[redacted]

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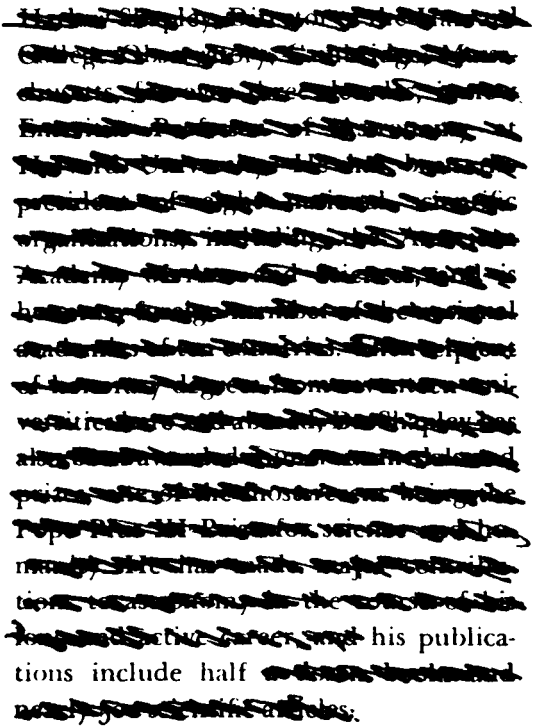
ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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PREFACE

[redacted]

But this is picayunish, [redacted]

[redacted]

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Etymology

[redacted]

He loved to dust his old grammars; [redacted]

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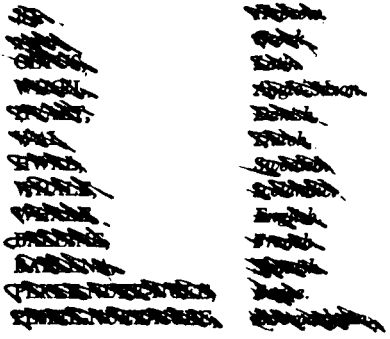

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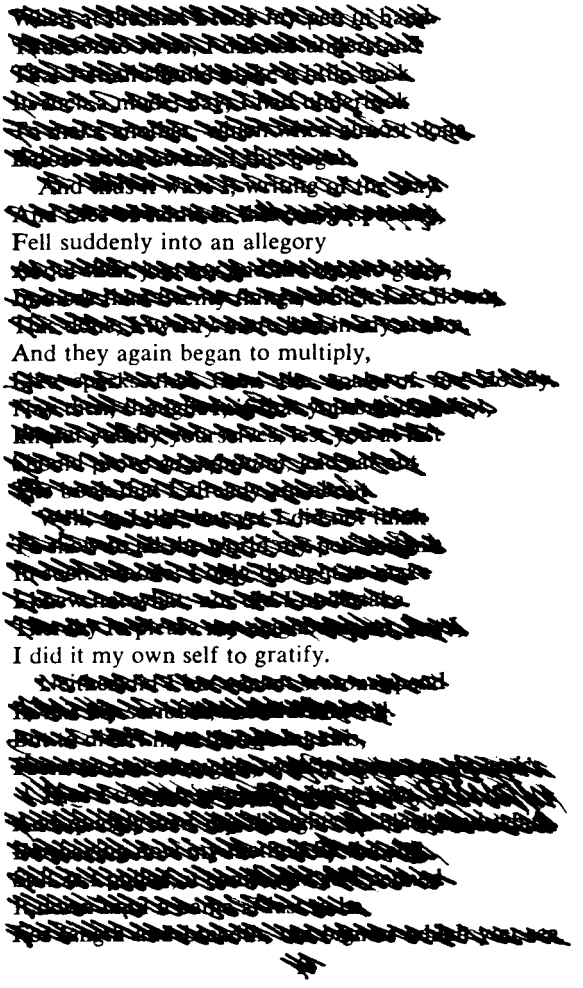
The Author's Apology for His Book



Fell suddenly into an allegory

And they again began to multiply,

I did it my own self to gratify.

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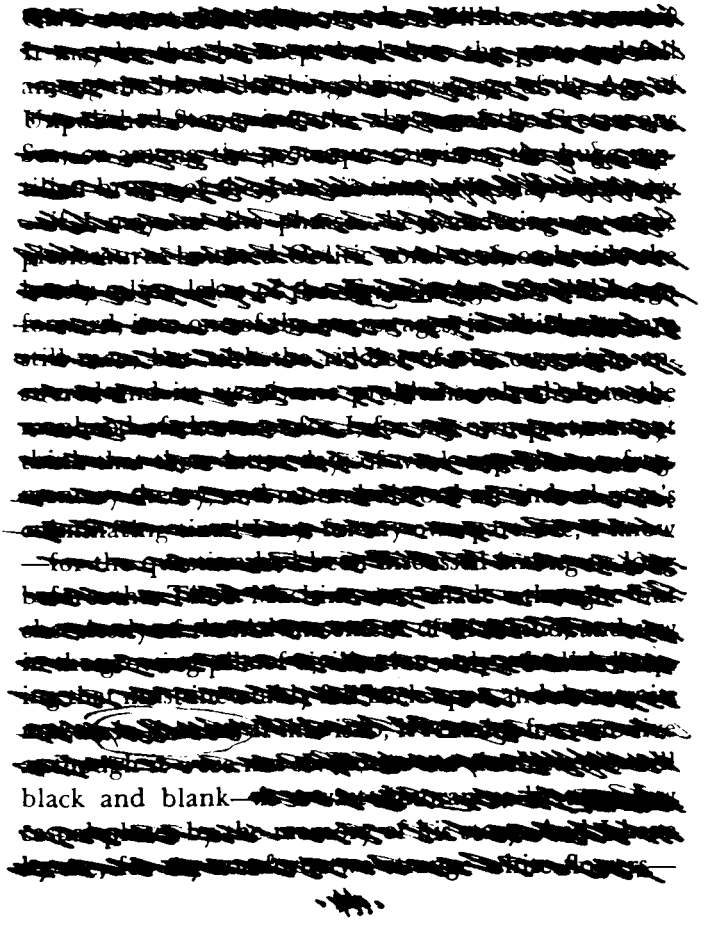
EPILOGUE



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Suicide: A Meditation

Bart Midwood

> Rabbi Pinhas often cited the words: " 'A man's soul will teach him.' " and emphasized them by adding: "There is no man who is not incessantly being taught by his soul." One of his disciples asked: "If this is so, why don't men obey their souls?" "The soul teaches incessantly," Rabbi Pinhas explained, "but it never repeats."
>
> *Tales of the Hasidim,* Martin Buber

I prepare to jump from the windowledge, but at the back of my head is a voice that says, "What are you doing, you idiot?" But it's insignificant, that voice. Maybe next time I won't take it into account. So I pack my bag and I leave the bitch who drove me out there. Maybe I wouldn't even die if I jumped. Maybe I'd just be crippled or paralyzed or maybe I'd get my brains knocked around and change into a moron. That would be just the thing, in fact—to jump off a windowledge and change into a moron when all along I had wanted

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to change into a high-class ghost and drive that bitch up a wall. I can see myself now, sitting in the Happy House for Morons of a Sunday afternoon and watching her walk toward me across the lawn with a bunch of flowers in her hand and a crooked smile on her face. The pity of it is that by then I might be too stupid to get on another windowledge and finish the job off with dignity. I might even be content. That would be the limit.

My uncle Benjamin once said that usually when a man was driven to suicide, he was driven by other people.

"Other people," he said. "That's what drives a man to the windowledge."

I have another uncle, who is on the opposite side of the fence.

"Suicides are born, not made," he says. "They are born with the urge to annihilate themselves."

This uncle was hard to take. He was unkind to his wife and never noticed little things. He noticed just big things and mainly talked about what he read in the newspapers, specially the front page. There comes a time in a man's life when he needs to weigh his uncles. This one, Lester was his name, was thin and used to pick at his food like he was looking for vermin and get angrier and angrier because he wasn't finding any.

An old schoolmate of mine once put his head in the oven and turned on the gas but was discovered in time by his wife. He told me he put his head in the oven not because he was unhappy but because he just wanted to see what was "on the other side." But when I asked him on the other side of what, he laughed and slapped me on the back and we went down to the bar on the corner and had some drinks.

In fact, I'm lying about the laugh and the slap on the back and the drinks. The truth is he did try to answer the question but I don't remember what he said. His name was Henry. He was the same one who went to Mexico in 1962, to look up a famous painter who was a socialist under surveillance by the government. Henry walked into the painter's house one day

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and announced that he had come to help him start the Revolution. The painter threw him out. So he bought a horse and a pistol, Henry, and set out to lay siege to the capital singlehandedly. He rode about a quarter of a mile, fell off the horse, broke his leg, and had to telegraph his father in New York for money for airfare home. What keeps Henry going is his friend Glover, who encourages these adventures with ovens and horses, and then laughs like hell.

I told Benjamin about Henry. He said, "This friend of yours, he is mixed up. I changed my mind about suicide. Look at those monks, the ones in Saigon. They set themselves on fire. All through history you can find good people who killed themselves in this way. We should be careful when we talk about suicide. You and me, we don't know nothing."

Last month my other uncle, Lester, killed himself and left a note for his wife. "It was your rotten cooking that drove me to this," he said.

"Lester used to say suicides are born," said Benjamin. "In his own case, maybe he was right. Ever since we were boys together in Brooklyn, he was always killing himself. If you want to know the truth, it was her cooking he married her for in the first place. 'Ben,' he said to me on his wedding day, 'Ben, to enjoy food too much is no good. You get fat. You forget how many hungry people are in the world. It's a sin. With this woman, I don't need to worry about such a sin. It makes you unhappy to just look at the food that she makes.' He laughed but he was serious. Lester was always killing himself, all his life, even with his ideas. But does that mean that every suicide is like Lester? There are all kinds of suicides. Somebody says, 'Why do people kill themselves?' Nobody can answer this. It's better to ask, 'Why did so-and-so do it.' And then, 'Why did such-and-such?' You won't get the same answer every time. Lester used to ask questions like: 'Why do people go to the movies?' 'Lester,' I used to tell him, 'if you ask each person in a theater, you will see that they are not all there for the same reason. This one wants to sleep, that one wants to get away from his wife, this one is in

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love with the star, that one was dragged along by his girlfriend, this one has got to write a review for a newspaper, that one is looking to pick up a woman, and so on. You can't even say they go there for the images. Sometimes even blind people go to the movies. They go for the sound.' So what can we do, Nephew? We can't even make one reason for why people go to the movies. Why should we look for one reason for why people kill themselves?''

On the other hand, sometimes it's best not to discuss it at all. I had a friend who was killed six years ago on St. Valentine's Day. He was walking across the road and a truck hit him. He was twenty-three years old. Some people said it was suicide, and the gossip got out of hand. He was a gentle, generous man and everyone used to take advantage of him. Isaac was his name. In the week after his death three different women took me into their confidence; each said that she had given Isaac a bad time and that she had been the cause of his suicide. I told each of them it wasn't even suicide, just an accident. Isaac wouldn't kill himself. But they wouldn't let it rest. One of them broke into tears at the end and stripped off her clothes and told me to hit her. I wanted to hit her for asking me to hit her. Which I say not to be a clown with words but to show what a pass things can come to in this life and how very difficult it is to know how to behave in circumstances. I walked out and never saw her again, but often I regret walking out and wish I'd had a night of it.

Then there was Jerome. He threw himself off the Golden Gate Bridge four years ago. He was a musician, a saxophone player. He once made a recording that I played for some children, my nephew and his friends, but they covered their ears. When I reported this to Jerome, he scowled. ''I don't play for children,'' he said. Which was true. He had a dyspeptic style. News of his suicide found me half a year after the fact, by way of two old friends, idiots. That night I telephoned Glover. The three of us were at school together. Glover said, ''I remember the time you told poor old Jerome that children didn't like his music.''

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"Yeah? So what about it?"

"Nothing. I just remember."

I hung up. After a nasty crack like that, you give a lot of thought to knocking yourself off. Then Glover might wise up and repent. But not likely, not Glover. He'd laugh, just like he laughed when Henry went off to Mexico to devise the Revolution. If Jerome jumped off the Golden Gate Bridge because I told him that children didn't like his music, then he miscalculated. He ought to have taken me along and jumped in front of my eyes. As it stands, his death is like a rumor, just vindictive gossip. Every other day I find myself crossing a street to catch up a stranger who looks like him. There he is—those narrow shoulders, that straight back, that moustache, those glasses. You can still find his type in the streets, but not him. In any case, they say he was screwed up by drugs at the end. A chemical agent is what did him in. Everyone agrees.

Back to me. After I got off the windowledge, I went to another city with taller buildings and more windows—bridges too, tall suspension bridges across rivers. I could recite the colors of the rivers, all the shades, if I had the words, because I see them in my mind's eye exquisitely. . . the rippling waters, the swirling eddies. I used to lean over the rails and flirt with altitudes like a slut. I don't say I've done with the urge. I'm not out to harp like a reformed alcoholic. Like my Uncle Benjamin says, "Life plays with some people like they are toys. Suicide is a way to play with life like *it* is a toy. Fair is fair—you know? If you want to play, play. I don't blame you. Only don't get hurt. That's all I got to say."

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F. Keith Wahle

Secrets

You don't have to worry.
Your secrets are safe with me.
Your secret of how you construct a beautiful necklace from rainwater.
Your secret of where the Spanish swords are buried in your back yard.
Your secret of where you go each night with three changes of clothes and a toy piano,
of what you do with those hundreds of wristwatches
that arrive at your house each day,
and where you hide your broken arm.
I won't tell anyone about your plastic surgery,
or your magical fountain pen,
or the three dying leopards in your garage.
I will not tell them about your life in South America before the war,
when you met a woman who could turn men into sunglasses,
how you tortured her until she told you the names
of several high-ranking government officials
known to be addicted to laudanum and perspiration.
Nor will I reveal your secret cure for spider bites,
or for the kind of headaches
you get from looking too long at beautiful things.
No one will find out from me what is in the large black suitcase you keep handcuffed to your left ankle.
I will keep your laryngitis a secret,
as well as your whale, your pirate mask, and your knife collection.
I will not tell anyone about your tour of the orient,
or what you found under the baggage scale in the railroad station at Kuala Lumpur.
I will keep all of your other secrets as well.

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Your secret of how you can sleep
with the sportscars racing past your bedroom window day and night.
Your secret of how you smuggled sixteen thousand heavily sedated virgins
across the Mexican border into Texas.
Your secret of where you hire pack elephants in Cleveland, Ohio,
and of what their mysterious cargo will be.
The secret of your continuous pajamas,
your frostbite secret, your exploding handkerchief secret.
No one will find out from me what is behind
the enormous painting of Charles Dickens on your dining room wall.
Nor will I tell the secret of how much you paid for the mink-lined false teeth you carry everywhere,
or the secret of the bright pink locomotive in your garden.
You can count on me;
I won't breathe a word to anyone,
my lips are sealed,
I won't tell a living soul,
it's just between the two of us,
wild horses couldn't drag it out of me,
and furthermore I'll keep it under my hat,
I won't let on I know a thing.
I will always keep your hair-growing secret, your secret of crop distribution,
and your secret of how you compose music that will make all those who have heard it
wake up in the middle of the night
and wander through the empty rooms of their houses,
looking for the long-forgotten emblems of a family weakness.
Even if they fill my mouth with live bumble bees,
and put burning chop sticks on my bare feet, I will remain silent.
They won't find out anything from me.

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The letter openers under my fingernails will get them nowhere.
I will not tell them about your plane crash souvenirs,
or your secret formula for turning ammonia gas into diamonds.
Even if they cover my body with spiders,
or make me brush my teeth with a red hot toothbrush,
I will not give in. I am steadfast.
I know that you have discovered a new way to manufacture aviation equipment, but I will not reveal it.
I will not tell them about your wall safe, or your disappearing ink.
I will not even tell them about your life with the bootlegger's beautiful albino daughter.
I will not tell the man in the wheelchair aiming his shotgun at my testicles,
or the girl with the beautiful dress made of broken glass.
I will not tell the asthmatic heart surgeon,
or the policewoman with the shaved head.
I will not even tell the aging herpetologist with the scar above his right eye.
Other people I will not tell your secrets to:
dog-nappers, arsonists, men with jewelry, or women with artificial limbs.
If you must trust someone with your secrets,
then I am the ideal person. I am unshakable.
And another thing, I am loyal and trustworthy.
I will not even tell anyone where you've hidden your supply of Chinese cigars,
or what you will do with the crate of gas masks
that was left on your porch this afternoon by a man in a gorilla suit.
We all have secrets—some that we hear and some that we are born with.
But the secret of secrets is to keep them secret.
And I know all about secrets, some of the most famous secrets in the world.

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I even know the secret of keeping secrets.
Please trust me, please love me, keep me to yourself.
I am a man with no mouth,
a man with no sense of smell,
no memory, all conscience, and nerve to burn.
Love me as you would like to love yourself,
love me as you would love your secrets.

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David Daskovsky

Pile of Ash

When you were a little girl you lived on a street that went up a hill and down it again, which gave you from the beginning a sense of purpose, a glandular sympathy with the ebb and flow of all life. You weren't easily fooled, even as a child of seven you looked at the butcher with grave suspicion and demanded to know where that piece of beef had been the Tuesday before last.

Beyond anything you were in love with a boy who wore a sheepskin coat all winter and summer, a boy whose blood was so thin that his mother was forced to warm him up in the oven before he went to sleep, for fear that he would freeze to death in July as he slept in his trundle bed. You loved him in part for his weakness, and in part because there was something about the way he held his head when he spoke about things that mattered to him that resonated in you as deeply as drums when you are standing near the drummer.

In any case this luminescent child, whose lips glowed with rosy phosphor, went to sea by accident when he was fourteen, and like Freddie Bartholomew he was transformed into a whip tempered steel spined sixteen year old by a Captain Ariel who had a crutch and a stub of ivory below his right knee.

You hated him when he returned because he had fucked all of the whores in the Orient on their backs on their bellies in their mouths filled with light and heat and you had been saving yourself for him. You are lucky that you let him go to sea or you would never have discovered what he was like inside.

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Now his veneer is thin as a sliver of ice and melting just as fast. Now you can see everything that is inside of him including the rapist, including the man who has no name and is known only by the company he keeps, including the man who sleeps with Indians and Arabs alike and lavishes praise on Arabian cunts which are sticky like honey.

He is all of these things now and you cannot love him because he cannot hide anything about himself, he is the invisible soul, he is the visible dick, he is the invisible cock, he is the visible spirit. Don't blink or you will miss the transformation, it will pass before you are able to breathe or to think clearly. Now he is a carnivorous beast. Now he is a sylph on a rock in the middle of the ocean bending coral gently with his fingers. Now he is a lock picking fist beating ear bending cunt fucker. Now he is Saint Anne of the Roses dyked out in jeans and a t-shirt. He is everything and because his personality is so expansive he evaporates entirely and becomes a small pile of ash that someone who has a broom in his hand will miss when he is sweeping up.

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Tom Weigel

Exile

I am being forcibly retained in the land of no repute. Here all the chiefs of staff are too punch drunk to drop bombs on anyone. Liberation is passé for all except a few debutantes who have put their ostrich feathers in mothballs. Slavery is strictly optional and enjoys considerable popularity in some of the best homes. Backgammon runs a close second, followed by painterly notions of the sublime. Unrequited love has become a game of wits played between satiated hedonists. There is a street car that runs on hot air, which any senior citizen can ride for free by showing proof of having committed at least one unnatural act.

On Sundays, a special edition of every newspaper is run off with the type set backwards as a slap against public apathy. There are no more articles on the use and abuse of women. Animals such as the panda enjoy positions of power and influence, while many persons take race change injections in a desperate search for the cheap thrills of oppression. Meanwhile, the balance of nature remains intact, with the exception of the Argentinian ant, which, in certain quarters, destroys all pre-existing species of itself.

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Susan Stewart

The Carnival At the End of the Parade

I want to tell you, it has nothing to do with trees or luck, that the last carnations crumbling in the gutter, the float stripped down by the rain, even the drum major and the fireman, lifting their beers to the moon, are part of some other show, some other season, which the barkers have never known.

Not that it isn't July, not that we didn't expect it. Our names are carved in the muscles of the ringmen, our faces are loud on the sleeves of the clowns. A small town's talk is dry on our tongues and only this sawdust can soothe it. This is meant as fair warning, our tickets are as sharp as teeth.

I want to tell you how the heart flies out of the body, how the wind fills a ragged arm, how the screams and cries at the top of the coaster have nothing to do with the earth. How the rainbows caught in the glasses are the hallucinations of lanterns. How a yellow hound sings by the tentpost

And his song is the song of lions. Listen, the music here is not music, but the creaking of strippers with their metal hips, the crackle of wires that rear and spark like horses, the hiss of smoke from the mouth of an evening, wide and swollen with kisses. I want to come right out

And tell you—that mouth is my mouth and it throbs with every word. How the strippers are frightened by thunder, how they flinch at the sound of applause, how the gesture of the clown as he's hit with the baseball moves the audience to sob and throw flowers.

How those flowers land softly in the laps and hair of the veterans playing Bingo in the shadows; how their rings

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are flashing like knives, and the spinning cage holds too many letters; how as soon as someone wins, someone disappears with cards and buttons flying.

Listen, the things that happen here don't just happen. The horses hold fast to the merry-go-round because there's nowhere better to go, but if some night a small girl whispered "Venus" in their manes they would take off toward the sky. And the ferris wheel, packing a suitcase,

Would tumble after them "head over heels," which is not a name for love or confusion, but simply the way things go when every exit to town is jammed and the air is close with animals, when the fire-eater drinks with the fireman and the rafflers start counting the trees,

And this is my only chance to tell you—how the body can fly from the heart, leaving it there like a soiled red kerchief on the neck of a god in his shirtsleeves, the one with the strength to pull the levers that lift a whole town to the stars.

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Five Poems by Frederic Will

Tom Washes the Minerals

Tom washes the minerals first
before putting them on the table.
That way they gleam among the leaves.
Tom's wife sets the peas down
gently in the midst of quartz.
his son surrounds the potatoes with bauxite.
Mealtimes are reminders, says Tom,
of a beautiful marriage
between the organic and the mineral.
He patiently longs to consume the mineral.
He wishes his knife could cut into marble,
slicing it. He'd butter it carefully,
salt it, add a little paprika,
swallow it. From then on he'd eat nothing organic.
He'd nibble on the sides of mountains.
In him too the glistening patina
of minerals would grow hard and glossy.
Yet when he looks around the table
he sees a row of grimaces,
the same old pull toward the organic.
He sees doe-like confidence,
and the rotting passion of leafy spinach.

Tom and the Rebellion of the Carrots

Aloof, Tom planted the Garden.
Peas spring up there, he ordered;
tiny green arcs cracked the soil.
Potatoes and parsley responded likewise.
Only the carrots refused to answer,

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sulking in their seed shells.
Tom thereupon called a shaman to aid him.
The carrot seeds were charmed.
Spells were laid on the ambient humus.
Rain was commanded to fall on the carrot patch.
Several days later a filament of carrot
knifed up through the topsoil.
Nature, it reported, is in the midst of revolution.
Carrots, you see, are but the vanguard of trouble.
Tom listened closely, wondered at the countering.
Nature, he thought, would be the last resistance.
The next year, however, he had a problem with spinach.
And in subsequent years he found the whole garden
stubborn.
He turned more and more inward. He issued fewer orders.
He stayed by himself, especially in the springtime,
emerging only in twilight, for a review of loyal subjects.

Tom's Military Career

A lone bugle cuts the air,
sinks, and leaves the battleground silent.
Tom peers from his tent.
The enemy is barely visible.
He creeps out and breakfasts,
anxiously. Then he takes his gear,
marches out onto the field of battle.
Now he sees the enemy advancing,
dust, howitzers, an armored division.
He walks straight toward them,
charges at them finally,
galloping, firing,
He disables a tank. He turns a flank.
Then he is wounded in the finger.
His whole hand comes off.

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Another shot hits him in the back of the knee.
His leg falls away.
Little by little he completely vanishes
until there is no field of battle.
A swallow passes with a nest-twig.
An old man shuffles by,
heavily, inquiring
just exactly where the battle was fought.

The German Fellow

The German fellow comes when I least suspect him. He appears hanging around. He walks down my chimney, settles on a footstool, talks about the weather. I hear his rumors about the world on the skyline. I see what he shows me—papers with headlines. I go to the cupboard. I pour out a whiskey, offer it to the fellow, and light up my meerschaum. We spend hours in conversation. Later he beckons to his spirit, rises, climbs up again through the dusty chimney. I watch him disappearing. I send regards to the capital. Then I go back to my existence. I tie down the shutters. I stoke up the fireplace. I bolt the door, and put a tree trunk across the driveway.

In the Hollow Provided

In the hollow provided he beaches his canoe, fastens it to a willow, then walks into the village. He finds there a classmate from his old alma mater, goes out drinking, comes back late. He lies down quietly in the hollow provided. He sleeps an hour. Then he rises and wanders. He returns to his vessel. He unties it. He launches it at dawn in the hollow provided.

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Photo: Sinkman Photographers

James M. Cain in the 1940's.

James M. Cain
The Art of Fiction LXIX

James M. Cain, best known as the author of The Postman Always Rings Twice, Double Indemnity, *and* Mildred Pierce, *was born in Maryland in 1892. After an army career and early aspirations of becoming a singer, as his mother had been, he was a reporter and journalist for many years in Baltimore and New York. His first story was published in H.L. Mencken's* American Mercury. *When* The Postman Always Rings Twice *appeared in print in 1934, it became an immediate best-seller. The next year* Double Indemnity *was equivalently successful, and Cain became known for something more than his early journalism or his Hollywood scripts. Today it is perhaps more through the films of his novels that we remember Cain:* The Postman Always Rings Twice *was filmed with Lana Turner and John Garfield in Hollywood, and later (without authorization) in Italy as the basis of Luschine Visconti's first film* Ossessione. *Billy Wilder's* Double Indemnity, *with a script by Raymond Chandler, is a classic thriller; Joan Crawford won an Academy Award for the lead role in* Mildred Pierce.

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Cain died October 31, 1977, in Hyattsville, Maryland, near where he grew up, went to college, and taught. This interview was conducted on January 7, 1977, at his home—a small two-story frame house on a quiet street. The sitting room was furnished simply; an up-right piano stood against a wall. Then 85, Cain was gaunt, his voice raspy, but mentally he gave nothing away to his years. He lived alone in Hyattsville. His stationery bore a notice suggesting the reclusive and quiet nature of his last years: to those trying to get in touch with him by phone he had printed on the bottom of each page, "Station to station does it—there's nobody here but me."

INTERVIEWER

So this is where you grew up?

CAIN

I was born in Annapolis. I lived there eleven years and then my father, who had been vice-president and a professor of English at St. John's College, became President of Washington College across the bay, which is still there. It's one of the old ones; George Washington contributed to its endowment. And that's where I went to college. The next four years I had a pretty rough time because I didn't know, nor did anyone else, that I was due to become a writer. I had several jobs that just made no sense. Suddenly I decided to be a singer, sending my mother nuts. She said I had nothing for it. Turned out she was right but she should have kept her flap shut and let me find out for myself. But then one day, just for no reason, I was sitting in Lafayette Park, and I heard my own voice telling me, "You're going to be a writer." For no reason at all. Just like that. Now there had been signs. One sign nobody paid any attention to was when I was maybe ten years old. My father smoked Turkish Trophy cigarettes. At first he rolled his own, and then he bought ready-mades; each pack was in a black and red box; they were oval cigarettes with coupons in each pack. For seventy of these things you could get a fountain pen. I would send

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off seventy of these things and got a succession of fountain pens. You know how you filled fountain pens at that time, don't you?: you unscrewed them and filled it with an eyedropper. Today, whenever I take out the clinical thermometer to take my temperature, I think of those pens and the eyedroppers. So the succession of fountain pens may have been an omen at the age of twelve.

INTERVIEWER

Were there other signs?

CAIN

Well, when I went to Baltimore to work for the gas company, the first of the meaningless jobs I held when I was just out of college, I kept going down to this whorehouse on Saturday nights. I never did go upstairs, though twice I wanted to. One night I met this girl who was awful pretty, and she had pretty legs. I badly wanted to go upstairs with her, but I was afraid because of the disease which I imagined she had. (In Paris during the war I bumped into a girl, and I was horribly lonely, didn't particularly crave her physically, but she approached me, and asked me to spend the night, and I'm glad I didn't because I think she would have had my wallet with everything else.) But during this six months I worked for the gas company, I kept going down to that area around Josephine Street. At one of these places you could buy a bottle of beer for fifty cents. "Small as a whorehouse beer" was an expression then. They'd serve them up in glasses so small that thimbles were twice as big. For that fifty cents you were welcome to do anything, downstairs—get along with the girls, stick around—I was just eighteen years old. I listened a lot downstairs. Upstairs was another matter. I was a potential customer, of course. I guess the things you didn't do. . .

INTERVIEWER

What prompted your move to New York City, away from the Baltimore papers?

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CAIN

In 1924, I had met Mencken in Baltimore. He gave me a lot of encouragement and published some pieces of mine in *American Mercury*. It's funny; people always take him at his own evaluation—an iconoclast, a mocker, a heaver of dead cats into the sanctuary. That's the way he put it one time, and he was certainly all those things. But a man who writes words knows that there comes a point when you have to ask: What's this guy for, what's he in favor of? I don't think Mencken would have lifted a finger to defend the rights of some colored man in Baltimore to get up and make a speech against the white society. But anyway he knew I wanted to work in New York, at the *World*. Actually, I talked myself into a job there by seeing Arthur Krock. I wanted to get this job on my own cheek; the guy respects you for that. Another thing, you get a much better job on your own cheek than if the guy gives you a job as a favor to whoever wrote the letter. Mencken gave me a letter of introduction which I never presented. But he loused me up. Without my knowing, he wrote Krock with the best intentions in the world, as he just loved me, and that crossed me up because I didn't get the job on my own after all. So Krock took me in to see Walter Lippmann. Lippmann wanted to know what I could do for a job, so I started talking with him. I told him I'd noticed that they didn't seem to have any articles on the editorial page of *The New York World*. I was just out of the lung house—I'd had tuberculosis—and I had to have a job that wouldn't involve too much walking around. So I suggested a job where I would just sit around and *think up* articles, ideas. I said I knew articles didn't grow on trees. Surely it was practically a full-time job, thinking up articles for a newspaper. I went on like this, with Lippmann staring at me while I tried to talk myself into a job. I knew I was getting somewhere in a direction altogether different, that he was listening to what I had to say, and though disregarding it, he was meditating. I thought, what the hell is with this guy? He interupted to ask if I had any specimens of my writing. Writing, I thought, what has writing got to do with it? I was still

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talking about thinking up articles. Later, when we got to be easy friends, I asked him about this first interview and he said, I began to realize as I listened to you talk, that none of your infinitives were split, all of your pronouns were correct, and that none of your participles dangled. That was true. I talked the way my father had beat into me; he was a shot for style, and that's what got me a job.

INTERVIEWER

Don't you ever speak like your characters?

CAIN

I slip into the Vulgate every once in a while—an affectation I only half-understand. There I am speaking impeccable English and suddenly I lingo it up.

INTERVIEWER

What were your impressions of Lippmann?

CAIN

Nothing startling about him except the difference between the man and his literary style. On paper, Lipmann was always to my eye and ear a bit literary. He was so described when he died—people doubtless thought of him as a small nervous man. He was not small—but a big, stocky guy, very powerful, with thick, strong hands. He wrote in a microscopic hand, so small the printers had to put a glass on it to read it.

INTERVIEWER

What did he have you do on the *World?*

CAIN

I wrote editorials. Now this was tough, because I'd never read an editorial. Now this might amuse you: the first editorial I ever wrote. Miss Lasham, his tiny secretary, gave me a stack of New York papers to give me an idea, and an office and a typewriter. At least, the typewriter was an Underwood, which is the

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Cain

J. M. Cain,
616 East 10th St.,
Burbank. Calif.

BAR-B-Q

By James M. Cain

They threw me off the hay truck about noon. I had swung on the night before, down at the border, and as soon as I got up there under the canvas, I went to sleep. I needed plenty of that, after three weeks in Tia Juana, and I was still getting it when they pulled off to one side to let the engine cool. Then they saw a foot sticking out and threw me off. I tried some comical stuff, but all I got was a dead pan, so that gag was out. They gave me a cigarette, though, and I hiked down the road to find something to eat.

That was when I hit this Twin Oaks Tavern. It was nothing but a roadside sandwich joint, like a million others in California. There was a lunchroom part, and over that the house part, where they lived, and off to one side a filling station, and out back a half dozen shacks that they called an auto court. I blew in there in a hurry and began looking down the road. When the Greek showed, I asked if a guy had been by in a cadillac. He was to pick me up here, I said, and we were to have lunch. Not today, said the Greek. He layed a place at one of the tables and asked me what I was going to have. I said orange juice, corn flakes, fried eggs and bacon, enchilada, flapjacks, and coffee. Pretty soon he came out with the orange juice and the corn flakes.

"Hold on, now. One thing I got to tell you. If this guy don't show up, you'll have to trust me for it. This was to

A manuscript page from James M. Cain's Bar-B-Q, *an early draft of his novel* The Postman Always Rings Twice

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kind I like. Mr. Highland, from the typesetting office, said, Now here's a subject for you to write about—the Ruhr. Well, I said, sure I could write about it soon as I found out where it is. So I sat there in my office thinking, never read any goddamn editorials yet, and now I'm supposed to be *writing* one. Then it flitted through my mind what we always said in Sun City: editorials (we called them idiotorials) were written by trained seals whose only qualifications were that they be in favor of motherhood and against the man-eating shark. So I wrote this editorial: we're all in favor of motherhood, I said, but what's with this fish? Why should we be against the man-eating shark? It's a very well-behaved fish, I said, given to no unseemly outcries, which doesn't attack unless attack-ted (I put that in). Leave us never forget, I said, that the man-eating shark is a fish that brings forth its young alive. It's been doing this for two million years, long before the human race had ever been heard of, they were mothers long before we were. Obviously the man-eating shark in a very real sense *is* motherhood. So that was the first one. I'd put those things into the secretary's basket and sneak down the stairs.

INTERVIEWER

What was Lippmann's opinion of your editorials?

CAIN

Well, he read them at least. He once asked me if I realized that 40 percent of the allusions in my editorials were to Lewis Carroll and W.S. Gilbert. But Mencken! Did you know that he never even read *Alice in Wonderland?* Imagine: Henry Mencken never read the greatest novel in the English language.

INTERVIEWER

After *The World* you went to *The New Yorker,* didn't you? You were the managing editor there.

CAIN

I needed a good salary because I had been working for *The*

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World, doing editorials, and features, as well as writing in the weekend magazine. Combined, I got $250, a nice wage in those days. With *The New Yorker* job, I got the same thing.

INTERVIEWER

What was your recollection of working with Harold Ross?

CAIN

If I started talking about it I would sound as if I were a guy who virtuously knew all the right answers and that Ross could not accept my superior wisdom. But I have to preface that by saying that it was a job that I was weirdly unqualified for temperamentally. I wasn't a flop at the job, but it meant nothing to me; I couldn't take any pride in it. I did well enough.

Ross had a streak that nobody who writes him up ever mentions. I don't think Thurber had any idea this streak in Ross existed that I had to battle morning, noon and night. I'll tell you what the streak was. He had this reputation, you know, of getting out the most sophisticated magazine in the world, yet he'd talk like a Colorado hillbilly; he's say to me, "We gotta get this place organized." I didn't quite know what he meant, but after being there a couple of weeks, I began to detect this uneasy improvisation . . . things getting lost, nobody quite knowing how to go about things, and I began to get what he was talking about. My first realization came from my own experience. I'd inherited a girl from Ogden Nash, a secretary, and I discovered I was spending my days not doing my work but telling her how to do hers. Finally, after making an inquiry about it, and finding out she came from a family comfortably situated here in New York and wouldn't starve if she got let out, I let her out and told Ross, I'm getting a new girl. The trouble with this girl is that she's no good because you don't pay her enough, only about twenty-two dollars a week; you can't get a good girl for twenty-two dollars; I'm going to pay thirty-five dollars. In the depths of the Depression, thirty-five dollars a week was quite nice pay for a secretary; he gulped and looked rather strange. Ross had this idea about "talent,"

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meaning only writers and artists. He was wonderful up there in "21," his table was a hub; they just doted on him; sitting down with him for five minutes, he was the big gun; you can't imagine his magnetism, the inspiration he was to these people. But he regarded secretaries and "non-talent" functionaries around the magazine, accountants and things like that, as practically thieves, probably with their hands in the till. He begrudged them every dime they made. One time he said to me, "Plugs, Cain, plugs. I can't get a *writer* except by watching everywhere and grabbing him off. But I can get a line around the block of these secretaries just by putting an ad in the paper. They're all plugs." Human ciphers, he meant. I said, Look, to me they're all human beings and there's no such thing as a plug. But for the sake of argument, let's call them plugs. They're good plugs and bad plugs. And there are plugs competent to do their work and those that aren't. By getting competent secretaries and paying them enough that they do their work, you'll save money; you won't need as many editors. That wasn't the only battle I had with him. He was inclined to make his decisions without consulting me. I didn't ask for approval, but if something was going across my desk I had to know. He made deals I didn't even know about. The thing that finally brought me up tight was the case of John O'Hara. O'Hara wanted an advance from the magazine; Ross promised it to him. When I heard about it, I made an issue of it. I said, Goddam it, you cannot do things like that without my knowing. Then Ross withdrew the advance from O'Hara, or said he did. And I then thought, Why in hell do I make an issue of these things? Here's a man, O'Hara, you have every admiration for, who's personally fairly cold, but who is a very gifted writer. He ought to be in this magazine. And yet you're making an issue of the thing. What the hell are you doing this goddam job for anyway? It happened that my agent had been making noises about getting me a Hollywood offer; I had lunch with him the day this O'Hara business came up, and I said, Okay, you've been talking a Hollywood offer. If you can get it, I'm receptive. I guess I'm ready to go out there. He had

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the offer by three o'clock that afternoon. So that's how I quit *The New Yorker.*

INTERVIEWER

What was Ross like personally?

CAIN

After 6 o'clock Ross was a nice guy. He had a gummy, tooth grin, like Caruso. And he listened to other men's jokes. But I didn't like it. New York is not even a city, it's a congerie of rotten villages. Besides, I had come from a newspaper where the ideal was information. *The New Yorker*'s ideal was entertainment. I earned my money, but I had no pride or satisfaction.

INTERVIEWER

So you had no regrets at leaving?

CAIN

One personal reason for being pleased at being in California was that I couldn't seem to write about New York. Those funny New York taxi drivers weren't funny to me. I couldn't manage the New York idiom. If you can't write like New York, you have no business living in New York and making New York the locale of your stories. There would be a falsity to it. When I got out to California, I found the people there spoke my lingo. They use a little better grammar in California than they do in Maryland, but what was even better for me was the roughneck who uses fairly good grammar. I found by putting the story in his mouth it wasn't so knobby and gnarled for the reader. It would kind of go along. . .easy reading. So, suddenly, out there in California I began writing in the local idiom. Everything broke for me.

INTERVIEWER

You were nearly in your forties then. Wasn't this quite late to think of becoming a novelist?

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CAIN

A lot of novelists start late—Conrad, Pirandello, even Mark Twain. When you're young, chess is all right, and music and poetry. But novel writing is something else. It has to be learned, but it can't be taught. This bunkum and stinkum of college creative writing courses! The academics don't know that the only thing you can do for someone who wants to write is to buy him a typewriter.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have any memory of the origins of *The Postman Always Rings Twice?*

CAIN

Oh yes, I can remember the beginning of *The Postman.* It was based on the Snyder-Grey case, which was in the papers about then. You ever hear of it? Well, Grey and this woman Snyder killed her husband for the insurance money. Walter Lippmann went to that trial one day and she brushed by him, what was her name? Lee Snyder. Walter said it seemed very odd to be inhaling the perfume or being brushed by the dress of a woman he knew was going to be electrocuted. So the Snyder-Grey case provided the basis. The big influence in *how* I wrote *The Postman Always Rings Twice* was this strange guy, Vincent Lawrence, who had more effect on my writing than anyone else. He had a device which he thought was so important—the "love rack" he called it. I have never yet, as I sit here, figured out how this goddamn rack was spelled... whether it was wrack, or rack, or what dictionary connection could be found between the word and his concept. What he meant by the "love rack" was the poetic situation whereby the audience felt the love between the characters. He called this the "one, the two and the three." Someone, I think it was Phil Goodman, the producer and another great influence, once reminded him that this one, two, and three was nothing more than Aristotle's beginning, middle, and end. "Okay, Goody," Lawrence said, "who the hell was Aristotle, and who

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did he lick?'' I always thought that was the perfect Philistinism.

INTERVIEWER

How did it work?

CAIN

Lawrence would explain what he meant with an illustration, say a picture like *Susan Lennox*, where Garbo was an ill-abused Swedish farm girl who jumped into a wagon and brought the whip down over the horses and went galloping away and ended up in front of this farm house which Clark Gable, who was an engineer, had rented. And he takes her in. He's very honorable with her, doesn't do anything, gives her a place to sleep, puts her horses away and feeds them. . .He didn't have any horses himself, but he did have two dozen ears of corn to feed hers. Well, the next day he takes the day off and the two of them go fishing. He's still very honorable, and she's very self-conscious and stand-offish. She reels in a fish (they used a live fish—must have had it in a bucket). She says, I'll cook him for your supper. And with that she gave herself away; his arms went around her. This fish, this live fish, was what Lawrence meant by a ''love rack''; the audience suddenly felt what the characters felt. Before Lawrence got to Hollywood, they had simpler effects, created by what was called the mixmaster system. You know, *he'd* look at *her* through the forest window, looking over the lilies, and this was thought to be the way to do it; then they'd go down to the amusement park together and go through the what-do-you-call-it? Shoot de chute?

INTERVIEWER

Tunnel of love.

CAIN

The tunnel of love, and all the rest of it. It was what was called the montage, and at the end of the montage they were supposed to be in love. Lawrence just wouldn't have this. He said this love rack had to be honest, it had to be real poetry. He

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revolutionized picture-writing in Hollywood; he hadn't been out there long before they all accepted his goddamn love rack.

The other important influence at this time was Bob Riskin who had been detailed by Harry Cohn, the President of Columbia, to talk to me and find out whether I ticked. Riskin, whose wife was Fay Wray—the girl who did the screech in the original *King Kong*—was the ace writer at Columbia; he did all the Frank Capra pictures, like *It Happened One Night*. A tremendously successful guy. He said to me, you have the strangest mind. The problem is, the algebra must be right. He said, you seem to think that there's some way you can transform this equation, and transform it, and transform it, until you arrive at the perfect plot. It's not like that. The algebra has to be right, but it has to be *your* story. I made algebra of it all right, but it was my story too, especially with the lingo in the mouth of a hobo with good grammar, like they have in California.

INTERVIEWER

The Postman Always Rings Twice wasn't actually your first attempt at writing a novel, was it?

CAIN

No. In 1922 when I was still on *The Baltimore Sun*, I took the winter off to go down and work in the mines. I tried to write the Great American Novel, and wrote three of them, none of them any good. I had to come slinking back to work admitting that the Great American Novel hadn't been written. Actually, the strange thing is that novels aren't written by young guys. I was saying that before. You have to wait for your mind to catch up with whatever it is it's working on; then you can write a novel. I knew Sinclair Lewis fairly well. Until he was in his late thirties he was just a "fictioneer" for the *Saturday Evening Post*. He wrote things like "Turn to the Right," and "Free Air," mostly just dedicated to the Automobile Age. At that time he was always riding around in a car, having his picture taken at the wheel with that wife he had, I forget her name. But then when he was 38 years old he got the idea for

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Main Street, and after that it was a new kettle of fish and a new writer. I learned from him, and also from the most prolific novelist I think this country ever had. Does the name William Gilbert Patten mean anything to you? His pen name was Burt L. Standish. Certainly you've heard of Frank Merriwell, "Dime Store" Merriwell.

The books about Merriwell came out on top of each other—Anyway, I wrote Standish up for the *Saturday Evening Post.* I've got to make a confession to you—I couldn't, as a boy, read a Frank Merriwell story. When I wrote him up, I tried and tried to read a Frank Merriwell, and I'll be goddamned if I've ever read one through yet. They were so utterly naïve, and so horribly written. But I learned from Standish, learned from his mistakes. And I admired the discipline that turned out all those books. You know, in all Frank Merriwell's perfection, he had a fault. Once when I was talking about how perfect Frank Merriwell was, Sinclair Lewis corrected me. "No, no, Jim," he said, "Frank had a weakness—he gambled, had to deal with it all the time." Just then Phil Goodman asked Lewis, "Red, how much would Babbitt have made this year?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Lewis in his falsetto, "I think this year about ten thousand a year."

"Oh, much more than that."

"No," says Lewis, "don't forget that George (Babbitt) had a failing. He couldn't keep his mouth shut, so he never got taken in on anything big."

Well, there are two writers who fall into the category of what Mark Twain called a "trained novelist." Each apparently developed his own characters on the basis of a weakness. I have no consciousness of ever developing a character that way, of developing any character any particular way. Perhaps it's something I should be concerned about, but I'm not.

INTERVIEWER

So do you work from a story or a situation?

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CAIN

I don't think I can answer that. I doubt if any writer could answer that. I don't know what I work from.

INTERVIEWER

But there are devices one can use to set up a story, aren't there? Such as the love rack, or the algebraic analysis of a story.

CAIN

Devices, yes. Like the old switcheroo. I used quite a few in my book called *Past All Dishonor.* It's about Virginia City in the Civil War days of the big whore houses. It's about a boy who fell for a girl who worked in a house. Every guy in town could have her for ten bucks except him, and the reason was that she half-loved him. This was a very nice situation, and I was able to do something with it. I was able to top it, and that's always what you try to do when you have a situation: you pull it, you switch it, you top it, which is the old Hollywood formula for a running gag. In *Past All Dishonor* I had this guy kill the rich man she was going to marry: that was what all the Virginia City whores could look forward to, some rich miner that would marry them in spite of their "dishonor" (that's why San Francisco geneology is such an unpopular subject). So he shot the guy she was going to marry. Here's where I switched it: he then had to enlist quickly in the Union Army, though he himself was a Confederate. He did it to save his own life because he knew this guy's friends would plug him, and also the woman that owned the whore house where the girl worked was going to plug him too, because this rich guy was going to buy the whore house so *she* could retire. So, he enlisted in the Union Army to save his own goddamn life.

Well, she's outside, waiting outside the barracks. He goes out there expecting the gun, she's going to get him; he knows he's going to have to face the music. And this is where I switched it again: she says, "You killed him for me." She's an ambitious girl, but to her the most exciting thing in her life is that he would kill a man for her. For the first time in her life, she's

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in love. So he deserts the Union Army, and they go traipsing off into the mountains. They plan this robbery very carefully. They rob the safe on a train, which he cracks open and it just spews out jewels and money. They take all this off on their two horses and a mule, leading them up over the snow. They're heading to Nevada, to escape into Mexico. He's got the girl and more money than either of them ever dreamed of, and jewels and everything. Up there in the hills they hear dogs barking. They can't be sure they're not being followed, so he goes out and camps by a rock to look, with his gun. It's been established in the book how he became an expert gunman, and how he learned to wheel and shoot, all in one motion, to do it quick. I think I quoted the saying that a gun is like breath to a drowning man—it has to be drawn in haste. He pretty well decides that the dogs are after a deer, not after him. And then he hears a twig crack behind him, and he wheels and shoots.

INTERVIEWER

And it's the woman.

CAIN

And all that stuff, every jewel was there, she has on her. Quite a switcheroo. I said to my little wife, Florence, it just had to be in the snow, where she could just sink down...and Florence said, because you had cleansed her with that bullet; the snow was symbolic, she said, it was perfect. Well, now I've gone and admired my own book.

INTERVIEWER

What about your novel, *The Butterfly?*

CAIN

That was never made into a film either, and it would be even better for the screen than *Past All Dishonor*, especially these days. That one was about a guy who fell for his own daughter and began laying her. He falls for her so hard! You

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see, I had this material left over from when I was going to write that first novel about the coal fields down in West Virginia. The one I told you about. I'm a member of the United Mine Workers. I worked in the coal mines. By the way it was Thornton Wilder who got involved in that book and suggested I work on it again.

INTERVIEWER

What was the origin of *Double Indemnity?*

CAIN

I wrote that under terrible pressure. I had been East to deal with an alimony contract problem I had. I had made a lot of money suddenly; I wanted to buy out from under it. But it took every dime I had. When I got back to Hollywood I needed money but quick. I can remember how the idea started. One day at the lunch table of the *New York World* Arthur Krock was talking about an early experience in his career, something that happened on the *Louisville Courier-Journal.* One night the copyboy came up with the news that the *Journal* was selling for a dollar apiece down in the street. The bulldog edition. Why? There was a lingerie ad in there. The copy said, IF THESE SIZES ARE TOO BIG, TAKE A TUCK IN THEM. That's not what came out in the paper. Arthur said, "You spend your whole life guarding against this sort of thing." Well, three weeks later the same thing happens on Arthur's paper. He's hopping! You guard and guard and then this happens. Well he found out that a printer did it on purpose; he hauled the printer in and said, "I know you did it but you won't get out of here unless you fess up about it, because I don't want anybody on this paper to think he can get away with something like this." So the guy said, "You're right, I did it, I did it." Okay. When Arthur told me the story I thought about certain traits in human nature. Then out in Hollywood I was trying to think of an idea for a story quick and it flits through my mind: suppose instead of a publisher this had been an insurance agent whose job it was to guard against that one guy who would

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gyp the company out of money by getting a policy on a barn he intended to burn down and suppose he collaborated with him rather than guarding against him. Wondering about that was how the story came about.

INTERVIEWER

Was *Double Indemnity* sold to the movies right away?

CAIN

It was published as one of a trilogy of shorter novels, *Three of a Kind* they called it. Two of the stories had already been sold to the pictures by Swanson, my agent, but *Double Indemnity* had not been. So Swanson got some page proofs stitched up and distributed them around. Billy Wilder couldn't find his secretary one day. Around four o'clock in the afternoon he came out of his office to look for her, and she still wasn't there, so he asked the relief girl, "Well, where is she? Every time I come out here she isn't here."

"Well I don't know Mr. Wilder, but I think she's still in the ladies room reading that book."

"What book?"

"Some story Mr. Swanson left here," she said.

At which moment the girl came in with the story pressed against her bosom. Wilder took it home to see why the girl couldn't put it down. Next day he wanted to do it as a picture.

INTERVIEWER

Did you ever go and see the film? What did you think of it?

CAIN

I don't go. There are some foods some people just don't like. I just don't like movies. People tell me, don't you *care* what they've done to your book? I tell them, they haven't done anything to my book. It's right there on the shelf. They paid me and that's the end of it.

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INTERVIEWER

Which of your own books would you say stand up best?

CAIN

The book that stands up for me is the one that sold the most copies; that's the only test for me and that one was *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. It didn't sell as many in the first edition as *The Butterfly* did. But there's the silver kangaroo over there on the shelf that Pocket Books gave me when *The Postman* passed the million copy mark. That must have been thirty years ago. The thing still goes on, and how many editions, how many copies its sold, I haven't the faintest idea. Certainly it's done the best in English, but it's been translated into eighteen languages.

INTERVIEWER

How did you react to Albert Camus' praise of your writing?

CAIN

He wrote something about me—more or less admitting that he had patterned one of his books on mine, and that he revered me as a great American writer. But I never read Camus. In some ways I'm ignorant. In other ways I'm not. At fiction I'm not. But I read very little of it. I'm afraid to because I might like some guy's book too well! Another thing: when you write fiction, the other guy's book just tortures you—you're always re-writing it for him. You don't read it just as a reader; you read it as a guy in the business. Better not read it at all. I've read a great deal of American history.

INTERVIEWER

Have you read the two writers who have so often been identified with you—Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler?

CAIN

I read a few pages of Dashiell Hammett, that's all. And Chandler. Well, I tried. That book about a bald, old man with

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two nympho daughters. That's all right. I kept reading. Then it turned out the old man raises orchids. That's *too* good. When it's too good, you do it over again. Too good is too easy. If it's too easy you have to worry. If you're not lying awake at night worrying about it, the reader isn't going to, either. I always know that when I get a good night's sleep, the next day I'm not going to get any work done. Writing a novel is like working on foreign policy. There are problems to be solved. It's not all inspirational.

INTERVIEWER

Like Camus and a few other writers you treat crime from the point of the people to whom it has personal implications... rather than from the point of view of the detective. What is your own view of violence?

CAIN

Oh yes. This girl came to interview me the other day. She must have spent the whole trip thinking up the question: How do I see myself as part of the Literature of Violence? I take no interest in violence. There's more violence in *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* than in my books. I don't write whodunits. You can't end a story with the cops getting the killer. I don't think the law is a very interesting nemesis. I write love stories. The dynamics of a love story are almost abstract. The better your abstraction, the more it comes to life when you do it—the excitement of the idea lurking there. Algebra. Suspense comes from making sure your algebra is right. Time is the only critic. If your algebra is right, if the progression is logical, but still surprising, it keeps.

INTERVIEWER

How related is style to your objectives? You are so well-known for your "hard-boiled" manner of writing...

CAIN

Let's talk about this so-called style. I don't know what they're

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talking about—"tough," "hard-boiled." I tried to write as people talk. That was one of the first arguments I ever had with my father—my father was all hell for people talking as they *should* talk. I, the incipient novelist, even as a boy, was fascinated by the way people *do* talk. The first man I ever sat at the feet of who enchanted me not only by what he told me but by *how* he talked, was Ike Newton, who put in the brick wall over at Washington College, right after my father became President. My father decided we needed a new brick wall down the side of the campus instead of the boardwalk they had. Every year when they burned off the grass in the spring, the boardwalk would kind of catch fire and there'd be charred ends of the boards. Well this bothered my father. If he'd known more about American history, that kind of American history (he knew plenty about American history but not that kind), he'd have known that boardwalks had figured very prominently in our history, like in Virginia City: the boardwalk there was an institution. But he had Ike Newton put in a brick wall and I would sit out there while he worked, listening to him. He was a stocky man, rather nicely put together. He had a hammer with a screwdriver in the end of it that he'd tap the bricks with. Well, Ike Newton put the bricks in, gauging them with his eye, and doing a beautiful thing, and as he worked he talked. The way he'd use language! I'd go home and talk about it, to my mother's utter horror, and to my father's horror too because he was such a shot on the way people *should* talk. My childhood was nothing but one long lesson: not "preventative" but "preventive"; not "sort of a" but "a sort of"; not "those kind," but "that kind" or "those kinds." Jesus Christ, on and on and on.

INTERVIEWER

Since language is obviously such an important part of your own writing, do you feel the motion pictures were able to transplant and communicate the Cain story and style?

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CAIN

When they were making *Double Indemnity* in Hollywood, Billy Wilder complained that Raymond Chandler was throwing away my nice, terse dialogue; he got some student actors in from the Paramount school, coached them up, to let Chandler hear what it would be like if he would only put exactly what was in the book in his screenplay. To Wilder's utter astonishment, it sounded like holy hell. Chandler explained to Wilder what the trouble was—that Cain's dialogue is written to the eye. That ragged right-hand margin that is so exciting and wonderful to look at can't be recited by actors. Chandler said, now that we've got that out of the way, let's dialogue it with the same spirit Cain has in the book but not the identical words. Wilder still didn't believe him. They got me over there, purportedly to discuss something else, but the real reason was that Wilder hoped I would contradict Chandler, and somehow explain what had evaporated when the kids tried to do my lines. But, of course, I bore Chandler out, reminding Wilder I could write spoken stuff well enough, but on the page there just wasn't any room for talky climaxes. Chandler, who was an older man, was a bit irked by Wilder's omniscensce, and he was pleased I backed him up.

INTERVIEWER

Did you ever hear praise about your books, or the movies made from them, that you felt appreciated their intention?

CAIN

Carey Wilson, the producer of *Postman*, big shot on the Metro lot, liked my work. Why he liked me I never found out. But he once said, What I like about your books—they're about dumb people that I know and that I bump into in the parking lot. I can believe them and you put them into interesting situations. After all, how the hell could I care about a hobo and a waitress out there in that place you put them in your first book. For Chrissakes, I couldn't put the goddamn thing down for two hours!

—DAVID ZINSSER

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Two Poems by Lou Horvath

Aphasia

for John Acklin

"the narrator knows the origin of
jean vu, 1900"

I take meticulous care in noticing the ground
under my feet
as i walk slowly
prefering to describe minutely detailed changes

For that's what they are
differences between one pebble & a stone
or a rock

And certainly i guess i see events
that i couldn't even mention
passages from green to verdant folliages
or bits of it, really

And it begins to get more different
as i go slower
and slower

Along what appears to be an endless path
for it keeps on in a certain way
without regard to what i will call
time

And so it doesn't matter so much
how long i am out here
once i decide when to come back
how ever that is

But what i am bringing back with me

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like an explorer

And how i will show someone, too
all that looking down like this has taught
me.

Nouveau Conte Poem

Jean Vu pulls the trigger of a .38
and the bullet lets go a quiet smoke
at first obstructing our vision
until we are paced back a few seconds
—perhaps it is a glance—
to when the process has not yet begun

We are able to erase the smoke
because of our ability to predict the future
as it were

Having done this we can see clearly
into the room where this action has its space

The bullet is now just about to leave the barrel
and from an angle parallel to the trajectory
and to the right of Vu
our gaze alights on the flower protruding
from a painted vase

We are looking directly out of the window
in one of the walls into a blue sky
broken at times by the jut of a white cloud
it passes very slowly outward

The bullet progressing toward its target
now is beyond the wooden table's edge
and as we slip to the other side of the parallel point

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we see the viewers of this scene
as they stand somewhere out there
looking at the plane of the oil pastel or whatever
other media represents a particular artist

The bullet's flow through the air of the room
is interesting at this point due to the fact
that it is restored to its natural speed in time
by a process known as poetico-temporal attitude

The victim who waits in the corner of the room
flanked by the aforementioned window
and another window in the adjacent wall
suddenly slumps backward and falls
to the rugless floor
just missing bumping its head on the table.

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Michael Borich

The Girl

was dead, face down
in the river, until I raised her
to air on the dock by her tangled
jasmine hair and pumping fire
of my lungs past her fish lips brought
her from the depths of reverse parastholis.
Aware of our brief miracle she jumped
to water again screaming "Die! Die!"
and I had to strike her unconscious.
For her own good I took her home with me
(she had no identification)
and lay her on a slab of cheese
cloth in the bathtub. I left the room
for a minute and came back to find her head
in the toilet sucking water. For the third time
I rescued this uncontrollable suicide.
And it has been like this for weeks.
I have had to shut off all water.
Drain my aquarium. Leave the pans and plates
in their unsteady stacks. Stop shaving.
My friends no longer come around.
The police only laugh. The fire department
is no answer. And the girl, this water
suicide calls me Humphrey. That is all
she says. Humphrey from the kitchen.
Humphrey under the bed. Humphrey. Humphrey.
I cannot escape or leave her alone.
She will dive at her wrists and lie face down
in bright pools giggling red bubbles. I am drying
up inside. The water level of my body is falling
into the danger zone. Now she is in the closet
laughing wildly and shredding my mackinaw
with her teeth. I run to the window and scream.
It is beginning to rain.

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Peter Serchuk

What The Animals Said

"Aspen, Colo. (AP) The frozen body of a young woman, discovered near here Monday, has been positively identified as that of a registered nurse from Michigan...the cause of death has not yet been determined...the body had been 'chewed by animals' and appeared to have been moved from its original location 'probably by animals,' the sheriff said."

1
She was not so sweet as you would think.
Not in the damp of her hair, not in the joint of her bones.
This you can believe:
So far beyond sleep, legs spread in the cold,
A stench so foul rose up from her flesh neither
Wolf nor bear had dared to touch her.
The blue eyes and soft feet were not what you remember.
It's better to forget.
The air itself had recoiled from her blood.

2
What brought her here we can't say,
Though perhaps kindness. She carried no weapon.
Also, she was not alone.
They walked together, in whispers, their feet
Packing the wet snow into small cakes.
His steps were large and his voice deeper.
We followed their feet past alder trees,
Past the blackberry stems which are so sweet in summer,
We followed them down to a clearing
and hid in the brush. They spoke louder,
She walked more quickly. He walked faster and grabbed
Her arm. She twisted away. He caught her again
Holding her waist. His hands were thick and his knuckles

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White as snow. She screamed, we became frightened.
She screamed, we clawed at the ice. She screamed,
We raced away towards the deep woods.
We heard her screams trail off like a gun shot.

3

You must believe he loved her.
He loved her more than love, more than pain,
The facts speak for themselves.
He had been so lonely, so terribly lonely, and you too
Know what loneliness will do to desire, and what desire
  does to love.
You too have wanted her.
His loneliness ached him beyond all need. Her body
  breathed
In the space of her clothes. He touched her
And the smell of pine rushed through his nose like fire.
He wanted her but she refused. It had been too long.
He touched her face. She screamed.
He kissed her neck. She screamed.
It had been too long. He wanted her but she refused.
He never wished her harm.
The facts speak for themselves,
He only wanted her as you.

4

It was quiet for a long time.
The light turned twice and it had snowed again.
We were hungry. It is hard to hunt in snow
And the wolverine is fast on ice. We were hungry and still
She was there. We could smell her blood push through
  the air
Above the trees. The air was sick. We could barely sniff
  the pines.
We scratched a path across the woods another time but
It was different than before. She was alone and didn't move.
Also, her clothes were gone and her blue skin stiff. She

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didn't twitch
When we jabbed her thigh. We took small bites.
Her flesh was tough and hard to chew. We took small bites.
We pulled her back into the thick and turned to go.
The wind was cold against our fur. We were hungry,
But the air was sick.

5

- was a hunter who finally found her.
Searching for bears he'd had no luck. He vomited twice
Behind a bush and dropped his gun. Later, they gathered
Her up into a bag for the walk back home.
"The most disgusting thing I've ever seen," one policeman said.
"You could stick your fingers clear through her cheeks."
The animals slept throughout the day,
Each in its own familiar place.

6

Tell us what repulses you, dear Human.
Tell us what frightens your children in their sleep.
Is it the rough claws and coarse teeth? Tell them
To stop crying in their beds. We are only a nightmare.
Their soft feet and tender eyes are safe.
We are not human.

7

Whoever here would die for love, let them pray
To die so blessed. I can't waste tears on her facelessness,
I can only mourn the kindness which she never knew.
She knew only our kindness, the hunter's kindness.
If whole now, she might tell us how it is to be a part
Of necessity; how the holy take sparingly, and how
The final test of love is not in the giving but the taking.
Be gentle with her bones. She has only now learned
The comfort of a hundred toes touching. The animals
Are running through the woods listening.
Let us bury her alongside all other lovers.

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Two Poems by Sherod Santos

Fear of the Dark

There is a space abandoned here,
to this room, as to a panting dog;
and a sound, like scissors
cutting my seven-year-old silhouette
from a piece of cardboard;
and a faint smell
of architecture that has dragged on
long past its incorruptible era.

And there is someone standing outside
holding an electric fan
which sweeps back and forth
across a trough of leaves,
in order to perfect my reason.

All of which I bear effortlessly, in a
meantime at no point, in no way, endless

because, redoubled, as I am
I am not myself:
the way things will be time and time
again is not possible,
and my hand dilating an entire room
is not what I think.

In fact, my hand is not a hand
but a whole house, and there is no time
but a thick, reluctant river
that cuts as cautiously through the air
as a surgeon cuts along a nerve
so that each advance is a thrill
of time and space and flesh.

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But what I'm faced with is almost
too simple, and confounds me
to find nothing is inaccessible
and no emptiness I do not occupy;
so that even now I can't imagine
what I will carry away with me
as the light begins its rapt intention
to surround me with novelties,
with its minute excavations.

The Summer Privacy of Things

For a long time, a huge
ragweed has been standing
in the flowers
watching me
walk around the yard, smoking
and thinking the
leaves aren't falling, aren't
falling. In last light
the lawn blazes like someone
about to be touched,
and the sprinkler
keeps scoring itself
against a tree trunk
with a sound like
striking a match.
The sun is indifferent.
Lingering just above
the horizon, it
is not aware of anyone.
It is perfectly predisposed
like someone in a movie dressed
in evening clothes, about
to step outside,
someone who comes and goes.

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Two Poems by R. Stephen Russell

How Michael Was Conceived

"If we have a turtle we'll name him *Michael,*
or *Michelle* if it's a she," she says.
This is one of those moments from an old movie
when a husband takes the hint and grows elated.

I am not elated, not pleased, only curious who
the Michael in her past might be: a long-necked
man or one who could hold his breath for hours,
who liked to screw in mud at the bottom of pools.

Then it occurs to me this Michael is around
the neighborhood, the house, probably now.
I check the shower, the sinks, even the toilets,
tanks and bowls, and the ice-cube trays, the teapot.

I am safe: there is no turtle. In sleep, my wife
dreams eggs, pats the soft shell of her belly.

The Egg

It is an egg that's in our bed. "Not surprised,"
she says, "It came to me in a dream." I don't know
her dreams any better than I control circumstance,
but this dream she could've kept to herself.

"Listen," I say, "why don't we eat it, dream and all?"
She has other plans. "Be careful," she says, "an egg
must be taken good care of when it comes to you
like this from maybe heaven." I think it's a duck.

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There are loud ducks all over the place outside.
I point them out: fat and lazy and wintering on
the same pond that is part of the decoration here.
One must have come inside our room last night,

held tight her breath, left us an egg to eat
for lunch. "I have a place for this," she says.

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Frederick L. Rusch

Elephant Poem

Soon I will become an elephant.
My ears will grow and begin to droop.
They will turn grey and floppy.
A string of a tail will sprout
gently behind me. My arms and legs
will thicken and turn to fat stumps.
I will drop to all-fours against the earth
where I belong. I will pad the soft dust.
Little hairs will cover my rough rumpled body.
And, most miraculous, my nose
will lengthen beautifully, glistening
in the warm sun like a splendid python.
I will kiss the tops of trees, delicately
sniff at aromatic leaves, rest it
on a warm stone before I sleep
in quiet bassoon snoring. With it
I will lift great tree trunks
from the backs of wounded tigers.
I will blow soothing breezes
against the wilting mid-day flowers.
I will hold water in my trunk
and bring it to the city streets
and shower black-glistening children
better than a million fire hydrants.
My trunk will curl in laughter
snort in ecstasy as I bring it
fondling to the great grey breasts
of beautiful elephant women. O,
you elephant women standing in knee-high grass,
please wait for me, elephants, elephants, elephants,
because very soon now, I will become an elephant.

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Ronald Crowe

Inventory

After layoff in Richland after
moving into the 65-a-month prefab a
packing crate in an empty lot with
peach trees good for writing the
novel and the broken camping
trailer in the backyard left by

the previous resident the landlady said
was past moving use it for storage I
cleaned it out one day after
morning writing unable to resist
boxes full of dusty mystery stale smelling
like old abandoned houses wornout men's shoes
pulppaper jesus tracts horoscope
mags stacks of newspapers saved bottles and
one box marked

personal property of E. Billy Mote

full of handdrawn maps tattered yellow on
coarse bluelined tablet paper red blue green
lines water blotched with penciled crosses one
marked gold here Montana Idaho Utah Arizona small
medicine vials full of fine black gravel and
dead hopes labeled Fish Creek Mont or Mormon Butte
Utah booklets on metal detectors and witching rods a
bundle of letters from people friends and Mrs. Ester
Mote hope you're feeling better I don't have any
more money to send and underneath the box of hypo
needles
dogeared booklet for diabetics various bottles of pills
capsules rubber-banded pile of bills from a Portland

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hospital grimy deck of playing cards yellow social
security card broken spectacles a pocket knife with no
handles and in a cigar box wrapped in a gray wool sock
a fine shiny wallet empty except for many credit cards
and Dr. Willis Glass in gold letters which I mailed later
receiving a thank you saying god would reward for
honesty nothing else.

The tumbled piles of detritus went to the trash
man who tossed me a grimy look as he slung
the last of E. Billy Mote into his white growling
machine and turned the corner forever full of

hope I wrote the novel every morning four hours bullying
friends away or laying chapters on them for wow or
silence and it grew and I rewrote until
I sent it to New York and sent it and one
year two long after I left Richland it now sits in a
musty box marked personal along with
papers letters and once a year I rummage through
and think of E. Billy Mote.

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Three Poems by Richard Grossman

Hope

Something hopeful is about to happen,
the shepherd informed. The last train

out of town toots in the background.
Everybody who remains waves.

On that train is a long cave filled
with hanging bats and asphodel. The conductor

punches tickets until the blood drips.
Our final destination is hope, he admits.

The train sways, faithfully following track.
The animals waited. Their anxiety momentarily passed.

We've heard that there is one paying passenger,
they said. Yes, somebody on board who paid.

Looking out the window, he is afraid,
not of where he is going, but of how.

And at the point of embarkation all his friends
are no longer waving from the gates of Now.

Plants

The animals were captivated.
We want the soil, they said.

We want silence:
We want to sift light and elements

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silently, We want peace
and good looks. We are sick,

sick of eating each other,
and we feel guilty, meek, abused.

We were hoping survival could be
a question of our location and seed.

These plants are so smug,
they can afford to breathe.

The shepherd replied:
Inside plants the same struggle rages.

Each leaf sweats.
Every root crawls down, confused.

Pleasure

A man in his thirties came along.
He said, My entire life I was burdened

with structures and a sense of death.
My insides were never good enough.

Today, it all burned away and I wandered
here. Among a shepherd and my peers.

Now life shall flow around me, colorful,
sensitive, unmeaning. This emptiness

is totally revealing, the pleasures
entirely new in a new world. Sharp, true.

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Melancholy paints the higher reaches
of air. I breathe the pain and lack of happiness,

aware that every thing and action possesses
sweetness. The animals were staring.

Glad to have you join the group, they said.
Take off your clothes and come live with us.

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The Pleasures Of The Text

David Rieff

In the Manichaean future, well-vaccinated against privacy and factions, there will be two countries. For purposes of recognition we must name them: one will be called Houston, the other Peking.

In Tien An Men Square, conversation is the building block of paradise. Endlessly, voices have quavered, muttered, and temporized; now this is finished as the mingled, dissonant languages come to assurance. Exegesis, sunny and sinewed, makes its rounds through the populace.

"What are we reading this year?"

"*The Critique of the Gotha Programme.*"

From Tientsin to Canton, that text is re-invented. After an ardent transmigration of sounds comes the rebirth of the soul. "We need history," affirmed the Aereopagite, "but not as spoiled loafers in the garden need it." In Peking the monumental grammer of that need—its interrogative forms, its assertive nouns—suppresses the inhibitions of clannish taste. In Peking, there are no loafers, no loutish exercises of consciousness, fractured or conservative pleasures. There is discussion, salvation through the production of community, and community through the re-invention of the text.

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How the citizens of Peking transform a text.

In shifts, over time, they rewrote *The Critique of the Gotha Programme*. The process was begun in music and ended in geography. It was the catalogue of everything in the larder of the memory and it led into amnesia; it was a solo that became a chorus, a song that wished to be a word.

Gotha, Almanac de gotha, Gotha the town, Gotha the thought, Gotha the Programme. Then came criticism of all the Gothas, a recuperation of that nineteenth century structure of invention, followed by more Gothas, interminable Gothas out of an indelicately effulgent well of Gothas. The timeless spirit of the concrete object Gotha, and Marx's attack on it. Finally, a transfigured Germany is reconstructed in Peking.

From Manchuria, across the demarcation line from fixed emplacements of Slavs, to Hainan off the Vietnamese coast, the word performed its miracle: unification. Like the perfect railroad track (order, the magic of the predictable), the word crossed the country abolishing and reforming it. In the chairman's book-lined imagination, the calligraphy of the past is bleached, becomes vapor, disappears. There are no citizens of Peking still qualified to mourn its passing.

How great was the burden on the life of the masses, how inequitable the reward for a structure that permitted the appreciation of those scrolls. In Peking, the character that represents culture has been re-invented and now symbolizes frivolity. The chapter that once meant destiny or fate is now only legible as exploitation. And what would God want? In Peking, misery is ashamed, history blushes at the gates of the future.

What God wants: accusation and repentance, study and industry, faith and harmony. In Peking, in Tien An Men Square, the human brain repents its cruel selfishness, bursts the frail shackles of sensibility, struggles. In Peking, only one game is played to win: the only victory worth having, the fight for the future that will go many rounds.

While in the Astrodome...

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In the bronze, brutal palaces of Houston no one is reading any books at all except those that awaken the appetite, strengthen the musculature: pumping thought. The mission of Houston is the rape of the future, a bare-knuckled argument aimed at the midsection of justice. Houston is a country that has filled its swamps and harnassed its natural fevers and forgotten everything. Its art galleries are indistinguishable from its gas-stations: low lying, pre-fabricated *filling stations* set on clean, wide streets. When the wind blows in Houston, it has nothing to move: no leaflet, no fragment of an old wall-poster slaps at the windshield (pulls at the memory) of the passing motorist.

The citizens of Houston overpower their visitors. Their justification for that slavery that they impose is admiration; theirs is a pre-eminently narcississtic reality. One is meant to *admire* the buildings of Houston which, tipped with steel, rise from the old bayou dirt and snap at the sky. What fealty to Houston means: creaming in your jeans.

The food in Houston is loaded with precautions against disease or discomfitting spices. The aesthetic standard by which the citizens judge a meal is its order: manifest in the packaging. There is no danger that the maid will be startled by apparition or inspiration as she stirs the refried beans. Houston combines the demented violence of a Mexican Sunday with the rational fetishes and preventive habits of the Anglo. Even the roads twist through the country with a flat, studded optimism.

In the Astrodome, electronic chimes ring in the battle of muscular youths. Beneath smoky glass that denies the night, red-faced men and women spit in the eye of the revolution, boost the noisy spectacle of competition. The loudspeakers announce vital statistics and the spectators clap until their hands sting with emotion. They are grim, gray Gods, connoisseurs of power.

"What do you cheer?"

"Imperial steaks and chops, energy, destiny."

The teeth of Houston are as white as the wall of an art gallery. Their smiling faces are scarlet as furnaces, pointed as

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the rare skins of their high-heeled boots. In Houston, the past is at an end as much as in Peking. But the future is carnivorous and not vegetarian.

For Houston has neither a language of transformation nor of *conservation. They have no words, only signs. In the war*-whoops of Houston one can come to understand that the pleasure (the text) comes from the indiscriminate bursting of boundaries. There are no reference points at all which simplifies the geography for them. After all, only monks need such a rigorous focus, not Protestant freebooters with slavery on their breath.

"What books are there in Houston?"

"Books of science and engineering, books that spell out the mechanics of desire."

But Houston is peculiarly fond of its whipping-boys, and strangely insistent on preserving the monasteries in its midst. Like a reminder, the cautionary example that gives their pleasure its vitality, Houston welcomes the foreigners and their viral baggage. These strangers who dare to mock the future are tolerated because they are riding on its coattails, they are its employees too. Sedition, there, is nothing more than a court amusement, and the citizens of Houston look on tolerably while the sermon from the past is preached at them. Then Houston returns, invigorated, to making things, to equipping the future with ice-machines and lasers.

Houston is based on the incessant re-assassination of all that is old: the air conditioner is their Romulus and Remus, and technology is destiny. In that country there is relief from the imperfections of nature—an empire based on sensation. Houston is a glove that slaps history's face and it knows all the secrets for making the past bleed.

Two countries, two securities—not yet ripe, but ripening. In between the two, there are only ruins, fading remnants of old, disabled gods.

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Portfolio

Six Drawings

Robert Horvitz

Robert Horvitz thinks of his drawing not only as a way of "overcoming genetic inertia" but as a kind of self-discovery . . . "clutching in" to the world. He writes: "Drawing is a metaphor for the self-world relationship. The tip of my pen is the "agent," the token of my presence in the flat, schematized world of the paper surface. Drawing enables me to model (very rigorously and vividly) many aspects of the self-world dialectic; that, in turn, allows me to see deeper into my habits, desires, and capacities, to "try on" different personae in different situations; and that, in turn, leads to gradual and systematic self-optimization—the real fruits of all this effort.

"The penstroke is made by placing the tip of the pen on the paper and flicking it toward me. The acceleration of the point quickly reduces the amount of ink reaching the paper, so that, in about three-quarters of an inch, it fails to leave any ink at all on the paper. The reason I use this mark, rather than a dot, say, is that I thought it was important that the mark's gestural aspect be made visually explicit. Otherwise, I

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wanted it to be the simplest, briefest gesture possible. (This technique was inspired by Planck's Constant, the smallest quantum of physical energy we know of. Significantly, this unit has the dimensions of an action). I try to make each stroke exactly alike. The only variables are where the stroke begins, the direction it is aimed, and when in a larger series of similar acts it occurs. I discovered almost immediately that the descriptive language imminent in the process is *prepositional:* between, among, across, toward, after, etc.

"It is possible to draw without any overall plan, but this very quickly gets boring. I am more interested in intentional activity: in positing goals, choosing strategies and "policies of attainment," taking risks for certain ends, exploring the *ramifications of commitments and choices, and so on. Goals* may be regarded as positive constraints: "I will do such-and-such." There are also negative constraints: "I will *not* do such-and-such." There are, in between, degrees of constraint: "I may do such-and-such under such-and-such conditions"; "I will avoid doing such-and-such, unless it enables me to do such-and-such later on." Constraints come not only with degrees of strictness/looseness, but with different priority, so that when a conflict arises, and two constraints cannot be honored simultaneously, one yields to the other. There are constraints on the applications of other constraints. Thus, it is possible to work out hierarchies of obligation, positive and negative, that govern the choices I make in the process of drawing, without entirely eliminating free choice. And I hope it is clear that not all of the constraints I work under are formal. Actually, the more specific and formal a constraint is, the smaller its range of application is. Very general constraints can exert a pervasive influence, even though they do not directly require any specific action. For instance, the core of my work is a series I call "The Dialectics of Drawing" which I have been working on since 1970. Each step in the progression must fulfill two major constraints: 1) each drawing must either introduce an important principle that had not appeared in any previous drawing, or introduce a

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new interpretation of an old principle so significant that it would otherwise qualify as a new principal; and 2) each drawing must be such that if I were to die right after finishing it, I would be happy that it had been my last drawing. As you can see, the application of constraints often requires a great deal of interpretation and personal judgment. Thus, the use of systematic constraint does not eliminate intuition at all. It rather organizes it and gives it a quasi-legal consistency.

"Having worked with this method for about eight years, I have recently focussed on some aspects that would surely seem esoteric to anyone else. Working out interesting systems or heirarchies of constraint is no longer what I concentrate on. The constraints themselves are actually of very little interest anyway: they just provide the framework for exploring the more subtle patterns of choice, preference, curiosity that energize my attention in an otherwise unexaminable, ongoing flux. I'm now involved with a series of questions raised by the discovery, three years ago, of the problem of "invisible violations," of violations of constraints done in such a way that evidence for the violation is destroyed in the act of violation itself. This points up the previously unexplored problem of internal conflicts of interest: Who judges compliance with the constraints? I do. But I am also the perpetrator and the legislator. If the evidence is destroyed, how can a violation be "prosecuted," especially when the "judge" is prejudiced by being an internalized conscience of the perpetrator. I am beginning to realize the benefits, (but also the limits) of having "outside observers," that is, an audience looking over my shoulder. The viewer-who-is-not-me often represents the next higher court of appeal. (This should really be the subject of a longer, separate essay.) Really what I'm involved with now is the gap between private knowledge and public evidence.

"At any rate, all this should indicate that I am much more preoccupied with the process of drawing than the product, and with the personal uses of the experience than with the public's access. Whenever I have encountered a conflict

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between making the work more accessible to others and making it more intense and relevant to myself I have always chosen the latter. Recently I read an essay by Lucy Lippard where she claims that "a work of art that doesn't communicate is a very poor work of art." I'm prepared to accept that verdict. I make no claim that what I do has artistic value. But I *will* argue that what I do has profound personal value. Amazingly enough, though, I have found that certain aspects of my experience are communicated accurately, if inadvertently, through the appearance of the drawings. A few people have read them so clearly that I have felt embarassment at having exposed so much of myself. In general, though, I make no effort to be either explicit or obscure about what I'm doing; the fact that my drawings have been accurately interpreted by others does reassure me that I am tapped into some concerns that are not just personal, they're human."

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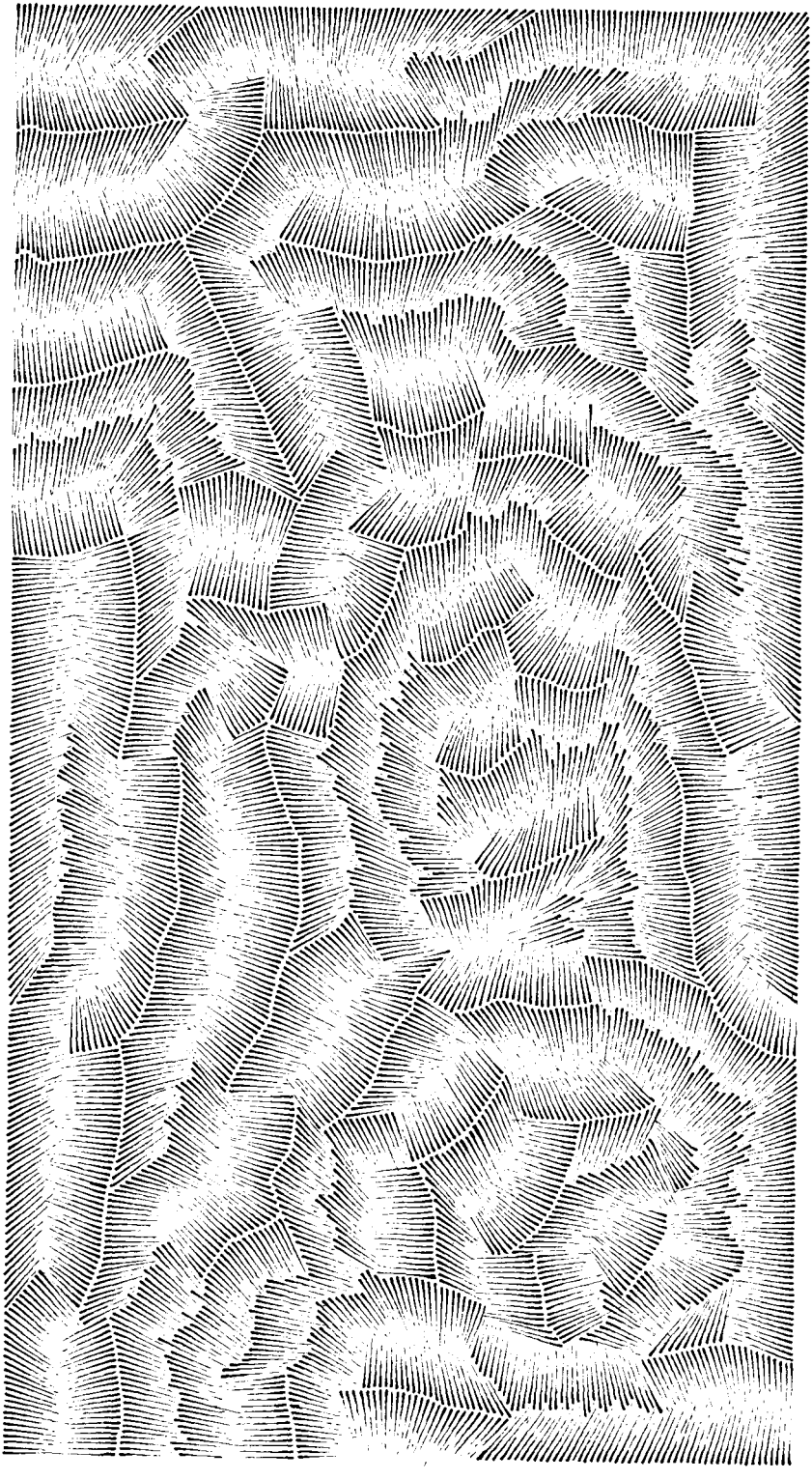

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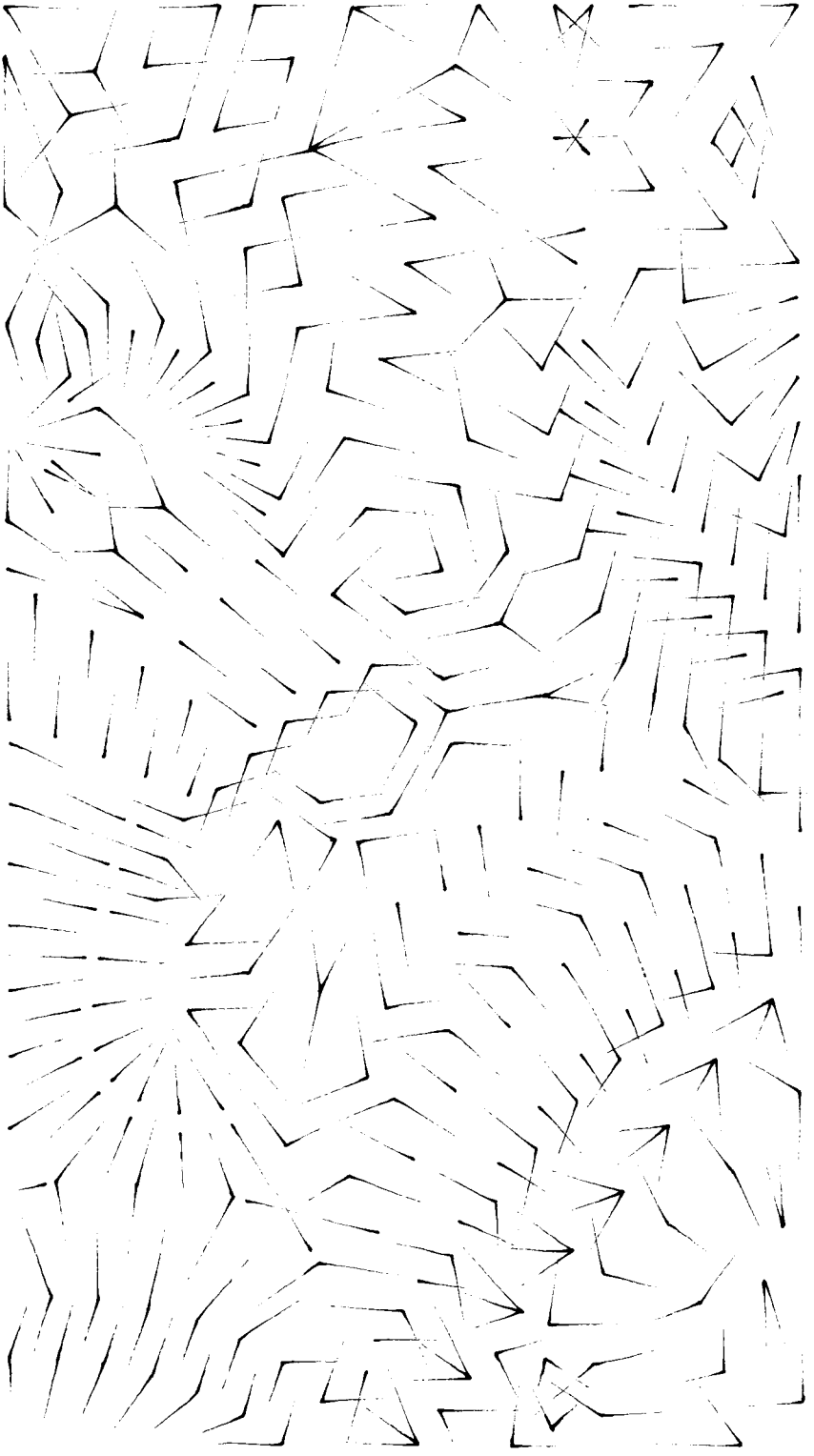

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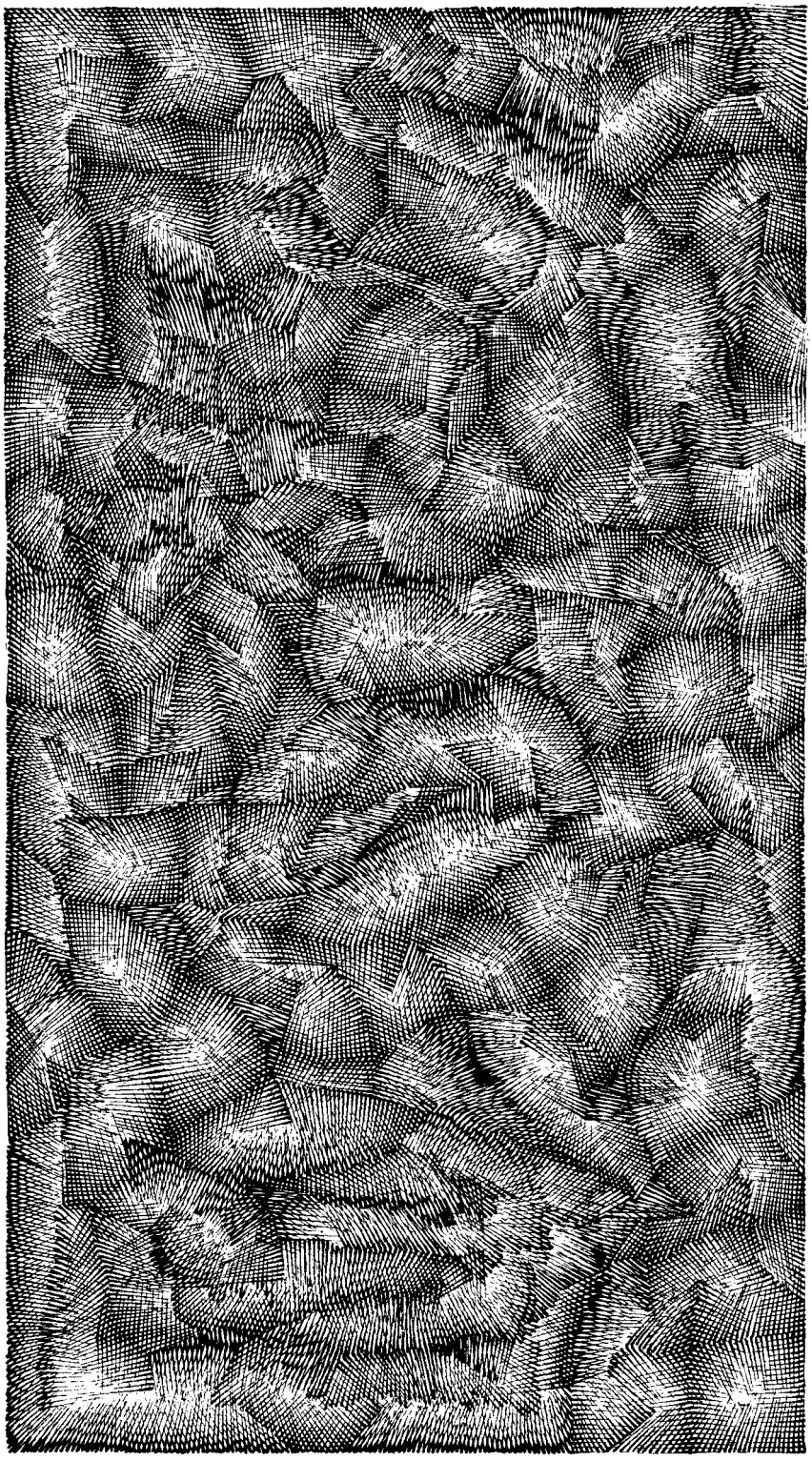

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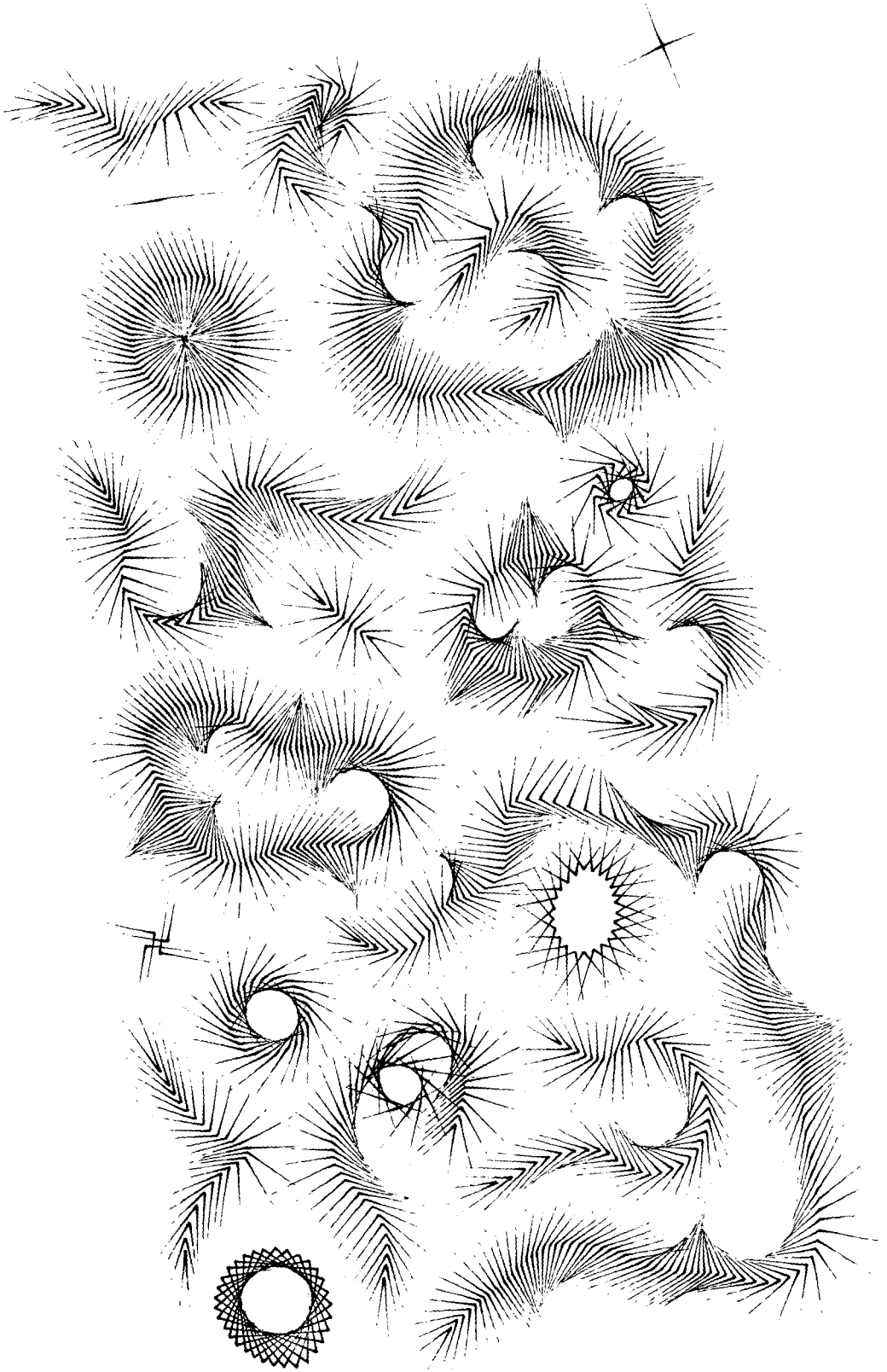

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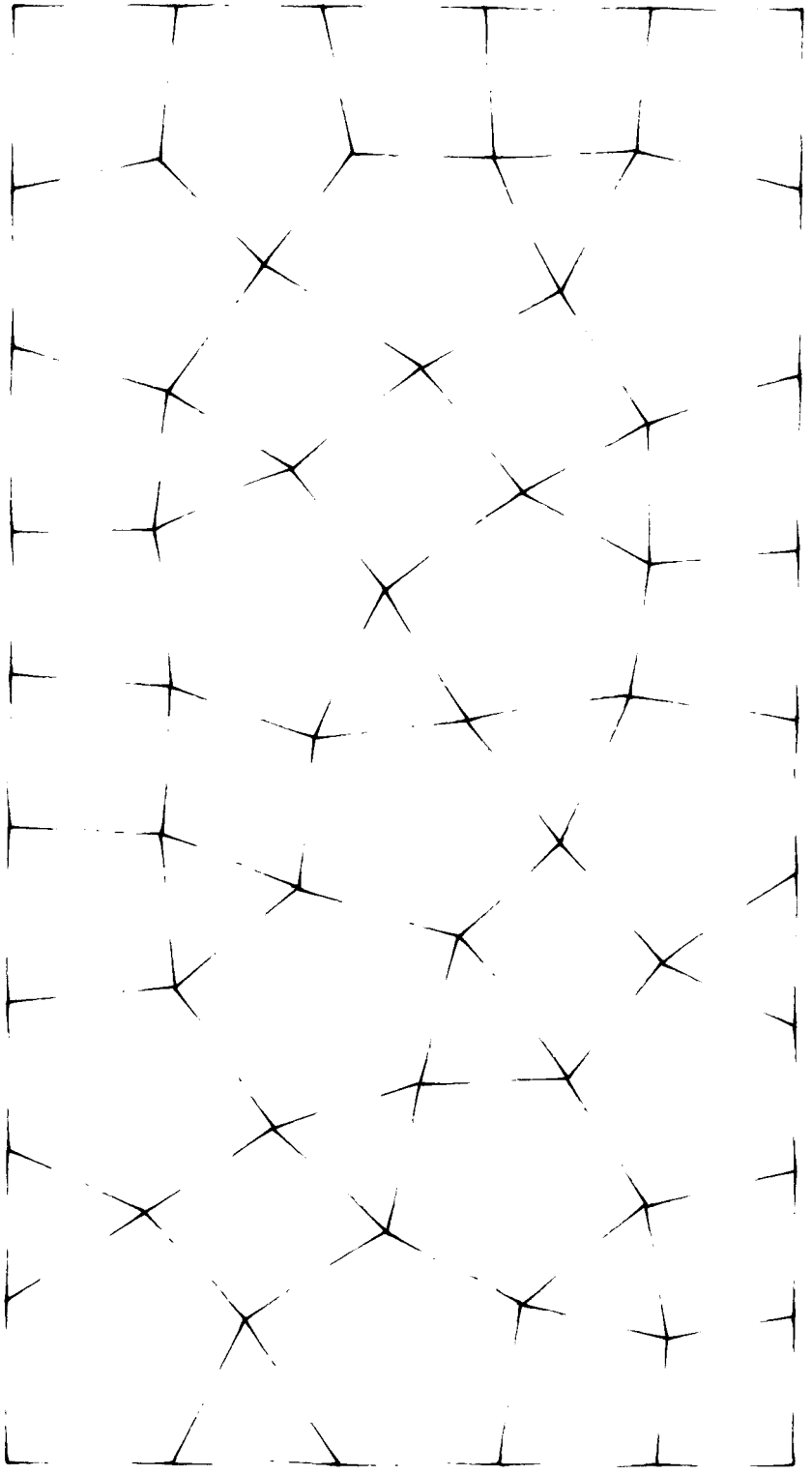

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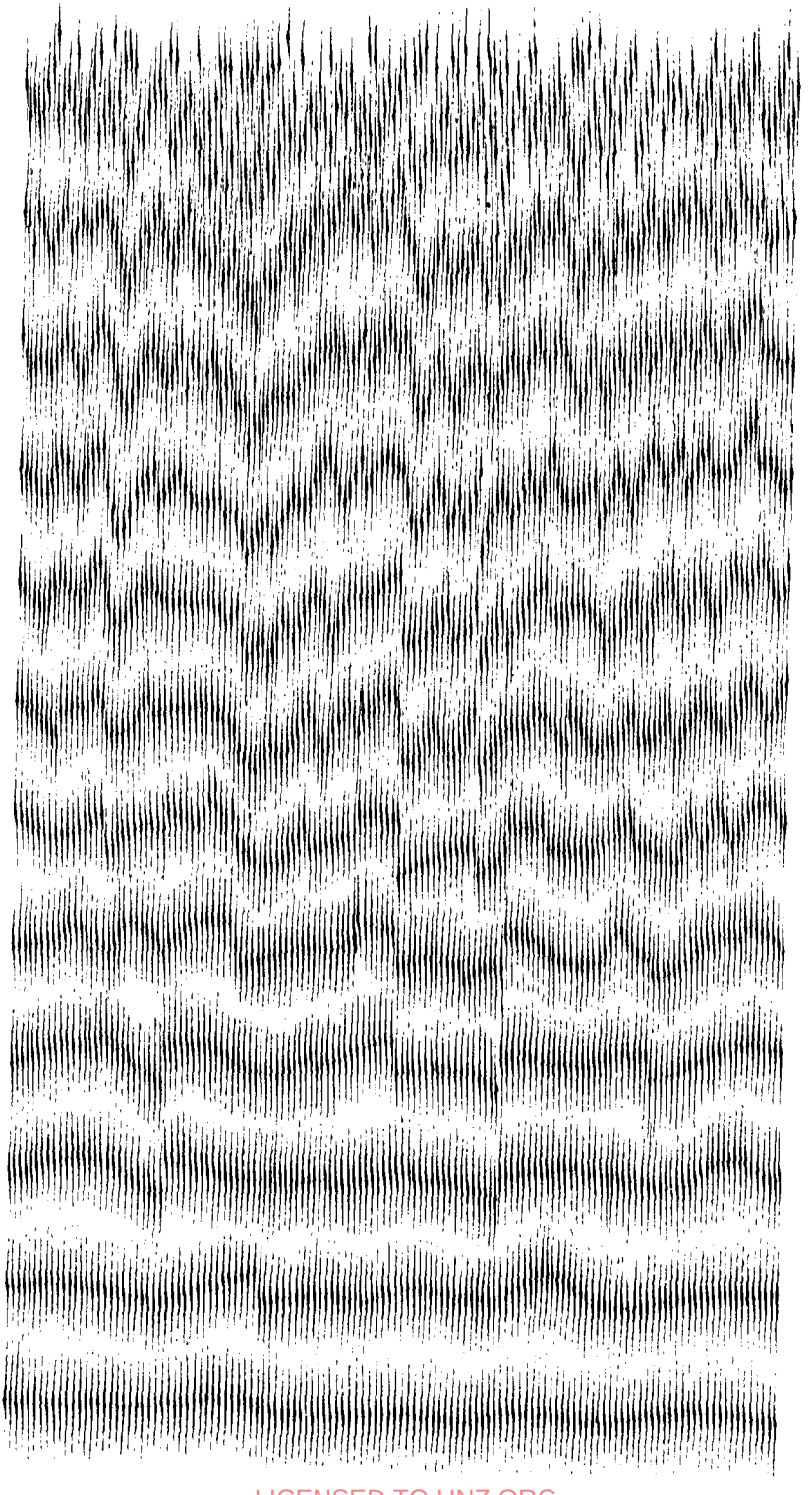

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Marriage

Helen Chasin

A married man is in love with me. Everyone has something to say.

"Again?" Carl says. Carl used to be a heartbreaker, blond and beautiful, but has given it up. This is now: he refuses to walk on the women who fall at his feet. He is in love with a person whose field is Women and Media. She is older. She has a life, it's in another city. She loves him too. "Younger women are impossible. They have nothing to say. Is this guy bull-shitting you?"

"When are you going to see him again?" Michelle says. She is seeing a man who sees other women. It's all up front. When she explained how important her birthday was he arranged to take her to dinner to celebrate. She has a right to her feelings. It is good to talk these things over. Think of time as events connected by space. Look back, there's a past, it makes a story. Michelle believes I will never know when I will see this man I am involved with again. So there is no future.

Carl and Michelle are my friends, they love me. They want

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me to be happy. We're all adults. They say this for my own good.

My daughter is fifteen. She is five feet three inches tall and this seems to be it. Her breasts are fuller than mine were when I was a nursing mother. Hers would be the perfect bosom for weeping on. She loves me. When she grows up she wants to be tall and flatchested. Let's call the man I am involved with X. My daughter prefers not hearing him referred to as that bastard. She loves his loving his small daughter and forgives him for being married. "He can't help it, it's too late." She thinks X is nice. They have conversations.

A kind of burning is going on all over my body, it seems to be just underneath the skin. I can't eat because I can't swallow. There's a gulp caught in my throat, it won't go down. It does not interfere with speech. There's some trouble with trembling, I've had to stop wearing nail polish. I wake up early every morning, full of energy. The work is going well. I'm a little thinner.

Nick assures me that everything will be all right. He said the same thing once before, five years ago, and it was true. But then the problem involved money.

My former lover doesn't know anything about this. He wants to take me to lunch at a good place. He says we must do it soon before the important chefs go on vacation. His most recent works are dedicated to me in terms which suggest eternity and intimacy. In fact intimacies. They're junk, I can't respect him. Nick finds the vulgarity appalling, but laughable. Nick's ear is one of the best in the business. I haven't seen my former lover in almost a year. Occasionally he telephones. He is supposed to be taking care of something for me, he keeps me informed. Progress is slow. There are complications. I will never do this again. He isn't my only former lover but it lasted a long time. The others were not serious; sometimes they took my mind off things. Then they didn't. What's the point in having lunch? I can't swallow.

Is it the burning that wakes me at six in the morning? The sun? The Zen-like urgency of the moment? The narrative

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thrust? When I open my eyes I flash: X and daylight, X, coffee, X, working, X, he's in the same day I'm in. Out there.

There is nothing in this situation that isn't in Tolstoy, The Dream of the Red Chamber, As the World Turns. But this is different.

At the time I met X I had my daughter, my work, my friends, I was interested. I was happy. A woman in these circumstances is called a woman alone. Also I was thinking. Mulling. . . the usual. Whether exciting and durable love, let's say between a man and a woman, is out of the question. Because that would be very useful information to have.

Or any kind of exciting and durable love.

My lesbian friend asks, "Is it possible? and if so am I capable of it?" She loves me, but not that way. She is thinking about women who live downtown. She is into the examined life: consciousness and trying, especially spiritually. "Ever since I left my husband I've been trying to be married again, in one way or another. So far it hasn't worked out."

Together Lynn and Norman pull down eighty a year. They own an eight-room co-op on Park Ave. They travel: the Continent, the Islands, the Cape, and so on. They're still happy. It's been four years. They are not going to have a baby. On Christmas Day they came for dinner. They brought presents, beautifully wrapped, for my children. We talked about being Jews. We talked about Time's Man of the Year, who turned out to be twelve women. I can't picture Lynn and Norman making love, just hugging with their pajamas on. But I can't picture anyone making love. I can't read blueprints, either. Your mind either works that way or it doesn't.

My son loves me, we are soul-pigeons. He lives with his father now. He comes in on weekends sometimes and vacations. He hasn't met X yet.

My ex-husband is on his third marriage. It seems to be working out. When we were engaged it occurred to me that we could always get a divorce.

I believe in voluntary relationships. But I can see that contractual arrangements have their advantages, legally and

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economically. They could even be necessary. Children, for example. Civilization. Still the word *marriage,* when I take it personally, makes me antsy. There's something tacky . . . however I'm crazy about the phrase *living in sin.* I see the Rainbow Room: Art Deco passion and glamour, a black-and-silver bliss-out. I love it so much sometimes I want to do it. Why not? Maybe all our problems are architectural.

A long time ago a clairvoyant said, "I see you living in another state." She wasn't dealing in metaphor, she meant one of the fifty. Two years later she was right. A lot of her information came to her in visual images.

Nick has not met X. This is what he likes about him: X and I do not spend many hours talking about our relationship. We talk about his work. We discuss books and movies. We mention train schedules. We go to wonderful restaurants. We go to art galleries and museums. We listen to the cuts on the new Stones album he prefers, the first three: Hot Stuff, Hand of Fate, Cherry Oh Baby. He is the most elegant and graceful man I have ever met. Sometimes, especially when he is about to leave, or has just arrived, I don't let myself look at him, I mean the kind of looking that's like being thirsty and drinking. I look out of the window, I look up the street, I look past him. As if I'm afraid I'll use him up. As if one of us were breakable. How long does that feeling last? Suppose we were living together.

No one is breakable, even from joy. Sometimes someone cracks, they get nasty, they do a lot of damage. No one has ever killed himself because of me. Whenever I imagine what they will do instead of suicide it looks like success, triumph even: they get tenure, they have a best-seller, their show at Betty Parsons blows the ceiling off the art market. At the age of thirty-one they get the Nobel Prize for work in biochemistry. I suppose if I had really wanted to live with them I would have.

David and Vera, who have been married for eleven years and have an eight-year-old daughter, maintain dual citizenship: New York City and Arizona. Both of their places are very spacey. Until last week their marriage was so open

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there wasn't anyone who wasn't in it except you and me. Deceit was the worst, and middle-class possessiveness. No secrets. The trick is to understand the priorities. When they are in the city my daughter babysits.

"I don't understand it," my daughter said, clutching a fistful of singles. It was last year. "When I arrived Vera and Jim were there. Then they went out. I was playing Go Fish with Muffy. Then David and Jessie came in. They hung around, they puttered about. Then they left. Well I played with Muffy and we drew pictures and she read to me and then I got her to go to bed. Later Vera and Jim came back and she paid me and I left. It was funny."

"I don't like that," my son said.

X doesn't like it too.

"Open marriage doesn't work," David says, definitely sadder but wiser. Maybe a touch smug? Well he has suffered.

Vera says, "Open marriage doesn't work." Apparently these are troubled times, including agonizing reappraisals and survivors. "It turns out there's been damage and you can't undo it, you can't go back to before. It turns out you feel betrayed."

And all along I thought the very sophisticated were different from you and me.

These people could drive me crazy, all of them, my problem is I listen to them. I feel things, I put myself in their place. It's a mistake. David and Vera are not getting a divorce, they're going to wait for something serious. When Vera is away David gets lonely. What they should do David says is have separate apartments in New York. In the same building.

Marriage is like that. It provokes a lot of talk about spaces. And doors.

What X told me he had in mind sounds like living happily ever after. But first there is this situation. He is not free. I wish he hadn't said that. And whatever he does he mustn't do it for me, he has to do it for him.

Yes. But.

"If I leave my wife will you marry me?" someone asked,

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oh ages ago.

No, I didn't.

"If I abandon my kid how can I, of course this is an ontological problem, make an authentic and valid stand against the war in Viet Nam," someone else said.

"They must think we're stupid," my old friend Charlotte replied. She had been married for forty years to a charmer who catnapped at her dinner parties, awaking refreshed and lively to find her in an ill-humor between salad and dessert. A few years later he got a Nobel Prize in an area that takes brains and hard work. But not biochemistry. She held against him the part of her life she hadn't done. "You think it's easy being married to a genius?" She wasn't kidding.

When X told me he was living with a man I said I understood the difficulties. He was joking. We had known each other for three hours. I was trying to understand him, to leave room, to listen with no stake in it except hearing him. That was what the very beginning was like, before he was in love with me. It was raining. He had an unhappy marriage and no intention of leaving his wife. My hair was a mess from the humidity. The bunch of bores who introduced us had gotten lost. There we were having fun. It wasn't really important, there were no problems. Later of course he said, "I adore you." In terms of seriousness that kind of talk is tempting. As if intensity, or even extravagance, has something to do with duration.

X wears monogrammed shirts: he connects with time in ways I don't: tradition as personal experience and the future a kind of history, or a place. This is a question of class, not money, although the shirts are gorgeous and probably expensive. Also he's a Taurus, they're set into their lives like trees.

My friend Marian is out of town. That's where she lives half the time. It's where her husband and her daughter from her first marriage are. She said, "It would be a terrific arrangement for people who don't like each other. As it happens we do." They have excellent reasons but aversion isn't one of them.

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The husband is a Taurus so she knows what they're like: loyal and steadfast. Another way of looking at it is inflexible, stubborn, reluctant to make changes. When they met he was married. He was her husband's best friend. Of course they fought it as long as they could. The former husband is a son-of-a-bitch and creep. He is the sort of person who uses the last ice cube and doesn't refill the tray. She hasn't laid eyes on him in years, and better not. Her husband's former wife is another story. It's cool, at least since the accident. And his four children are cool too.

Marian hasn't met X but she's for it if he makes me happy. She doesn't believe that business about his not sleeping with his wife. "Why do they always say that, they must think we're dumb. Maybe they think we want to hear it so they have to say it, I don't know. Of course they are. Only what difference does it make?"

Something else she doesn't believe is the awfulness of his marriage, and for so long. Years. "How bad can it be?"

It's a good question.

All my friends tell me that my lips move when I think, it looks as if I'm about to say something.

"Maybe he *needs* the awfulness," my father suggests, "maybe it's his gratification." Guess what my father does for a living. He and my mother got a divorce the year after I did. Until then they stayed together for my sake. "Maybe he's wedded to the conflict, the wretchedness. Of course there are other possibilities. We don't know what marriage means to him. Or love. People are strange."

"Don't be a child," my mother would say, except that I do not discuss it with her, "they always go back to their wives." You can imagine the tone of voice. There is a man she could have married she didn't, this is forty years ago, some risk she wouldn't take. Well who knows what would have happened, but in a way he's still in her life. Sometimes he's the mistake she made in not choosing for happiness, other times he's trouble she avoided. Here is the odd part: in the early photographs in the box in the closet my father is the tall, dark,

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handsome, dangerous stranger of everyone's dreams.

A couple of months before X I was going to a party. I felt pretty good, I think I was looking OK. I told my daughter I'd be back around ten-thirty, or a little later if I met Prince Charming. She said it would be ten-thirty, I wasn't ready for Charming.

It's true, timing is very important. Or think of the people you could have been happy with if only they'd been different, and how long it went on, how you couldn't let go of it.

"They're doing a remake of Gone With The Wind," Nick says. "Well actually a continuation. I've got the perfect casting for Scarlett and Rhett."

OK, I'll bite: Shelley Duval and Al Pacino?

"Yeah, that's funny. No, listen—Diana Ross and Billy Dee Williams. They'd be perfect."

But they're black.

"Yeah but otherwise it's perfect." He is not fooling, he is totally committed to the concept. Look out, Bob Evans. If Luke hadn't been an alcoholic, if Tony had been taller, if Jerry hadn't been so bourgeois, if Clarke had liked women, if Max hadn't tried to communicate with the dead—and every one of them a depressive—my life might be something else entirely.

Maybe X wouldn't be in love with me. Maybe there wouldn't be all these people who are concerned about me. I would like to give a big party. I don't know when I expect to be so happy again.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

Helen Chasin is the author of two books of poetry, *Coming Close* (Yale University Press) and *Castle Stones* (Little, Brown). She teaches a poetry workshop at Columbia University.

Bart Midwood won the Aga Khan Prize for Fiction in 1976 for his story *John O'Neill versus the Crown* which appeared in issue #66.

David Reiff lives in New York City. His stories have appeared in *Fiction, Parenthèse* and *Madamoiselle.*

Anthony Valerio is a graduate of Columbia University. He has recently completed a book entitled *The Lives of the Addicts.*

Dallas Wiebe was born and grew up in Newton, Kansas. He writes that many of the names and places and some of the materials for his story, "Night Flight to Stockholm" were taken from K.M. Briggs' book, *The Anatomy of Puck* (London, 1959).

POETRY

Don Bogen teaches at the University of Cincinnati. He is currently at work on a collection of his own poems and at a translation of selected poems of the German poet, Johannes Bobrowski.

Phil Boiarski has had work appear in *The Rocky Mountain Review, The Ohio Journal* and *The California Quarterly.* This is his third appearance in *The Paris Review.*

Michael Borich is the author of *The Black Hawk Songs* (University of Illinois Press, 1975). His poems have appeared in *The New Yorker, The North American Review* and elsewhere.

Vic Coccimiglio has had poems appear in *The Paris Review, The North American Review,* and elsewhere. This fall he will be in the M.F.A. writing program at the University of California at Irvine.

Ronald Crowe's poems have appeared in *New Poetry* and *The New York Quarterly.*

David Daskovsky is at present at work on an epic poem entitled "The Wreck of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir."

Tom Disch's books include *Getting Into Death and Other Stories* (Knopf, 1976).

Richard Grossman's first book of poems, *Tycoon Boy* (Kayak) was published early last year. He has recently completed a second entitled *The Animals.*

Lou Horvath's first chapbook of poems, *Vu,* will be published later this

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year by La-Bas Press. His work has appeared in *Arete, La-Bas,* and *The Paris Review.*

Phylis Janowitz has a book of poems entitled *Rites of Strangers* to be published this fall by the University of Pittsburgh Press.

Paul Jenkins works in Town Hall in Greenfield, Massachusetts. His volume of poems, *Forget the Sky,* is forthcoming from L'Epervier Press this summer.

Peter Leight was born in St. Louis, raised in Kentucky, and currently resides in New York City.

Elizabeth Macklin is on the staff of the *New Yorker.*

Pamela Miller has had poems appear in *The Wisconsin Review, Out There, Oyez,* and other magazines. She lives in Chicago.

Brenda Nasio attended Bread Loaf Writers' Conference in 1975. Her work has previously appeared in *Icarus* and *Spoon River Quarterly.*

Frederick L. Rusch is teaching English at the John Jay College for Criminal Justice in New York City. His work has appeared in a number of small magazines and reviews.

R. Stephen Russell lives in Monterey, Mexico, where he is completing a novel entitled *Looking for Annie Hall.*

Sherod Santos is at work on translating the French poet Emile Verhaeren and also is completing a book-length manuscript of his own poems entitled *Drag and Shackle.*

Peter Serchuk works for an advertising agency in Detroit. His work has appeared in *The Hudson Review, Epoch, Ascent* and *Greenhouse.*

Susan Stewart has had work appear in *Poetry, Poetry Northwest,* and *Kayak.* This fall she will be teaching folklore at Temple University.

F. Keith Wahle is currently working at the Library for the Blind and in Cincinnati, Ohio. His work has appeared in the *Cincinnati Poetry Review* and *The Paris Review.*

Ronald Wallace has published two chapbooks, *Cucumbers* (Paddle Hill Press) and *Installing the Bees* (Chowder Press). He directs the Creative Writing program at the University of Wisconsin in Madison.

Tom Weigel has been published in *Not Guilty, Telephone* and *Screen Door Review.* This is his second appearance in *The Paris Review.*

INTERVIEWS

Michael Barber did the interview with Kingsley Amis for *The Paris Review.* His interviews and essays have appeared in *Quest/78,* the New York *Times* Book Review and *Books and Bookmen*

David Zinsser is the author of a novel, *Then When.* He is currently at work

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on a doctoral thesis about author Raymond Chandler. Mr. Zinsser was assisted in this interview by John Leonard of the *New York Times* and Roy Hoopes. Mr. Hoopes' biography of James M. Cain is forthcoming from Bobbs-Merrill.

ART

Robert Horvitz is the art editor of *Co-Evolution Quarterly*. He lives in New Haven.

Richard Prince was born in Panama. His work has been shown in the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum. He has had one-man show at Ellen Sragow, Ltd. and the Katharine Markel Gallery in New York City.

ERRATUM

The poem, "Lemon Seed," by Holly Prado which appeared in issue #72 was incorrectly set. It was intended to appear as a prose poem. *The Paris Review* regrets the oversight.

NOTICE

Three important posts on this magazine have changed hands since the last issue. Bernard F. Conners, the publisher since 1976, has asked to be relieved of his position. He will be missed. In seeing to the financial welfare of *The Paris Review,* especially during its move back to the United States from Europe, his contribution has been an important one in the magazine's history. By dint of an extraordinary fund-raising function on Mr. Conner's estate at which all the guests were induced into taking out subscriptions, his home-town of Loudonville, New York, has a higher number of subscribers than any other community in the world (far more than Paris), and it is hoped that the former publisher will be able to impress upon that large bloc of supporters the importance of re-subscribing. The magazine may be in trouble if he doesn't. His successor is Ron Dante, a New Yorker whose particular emphasis in the communication field has been in popular music and the theater. He is the producer of Barry Manilow, the composer and singer, and earlier this year won a Tony Award as one of the co-producers of *Ain't Misbehavin'.*

Michael Benedikt, who became the poetry editor in 1964, has resigned. His tenure was a distinguished one. In addition to finding works of considerable interest and quality (in particular "prose poems") he was noted for presenting his selections in carefully orchestrated "clusters" throughout the magazine. The post has been taken over by Jonathan Galassi. Mr. Galassi is a graduate of Harvard and Cambridge University. A poet and translator (he is at present compiling a selection of the works of Eugenio Montale) he is an editor at Houghton-Mifflin. His selections will appear in the next issue.

Richard Marshall has taken over as Art Editor, succeeding Alexandra Anderson who will continue to assist the magazine as a consultant. Mr. Marshall is an assistant curator at the Whitney Museum.

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Donald Hall is a man who knows poets. Not just the meter and the métier, but the men as well. A poet himself, he served as poetry editor of the *Paris Review* for seven years. He knew the giants. *Remembering Poets: Reminiscences and Opinions* is about four of those giants — T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Dylan Thomas, and Robert Frost. Refreshingly, Hall himself calls it "literary gossip." And that it is — personal observations of these great men as they went about the business of their lives. But *The New York Times Book Review* calls the book "a modern classic" and Hall a "great biographer" of the four who "...come before us as individual, fallible human beings trying to cope with the conditions of 20th-century living while yet not betraying their poetic calling."

ON DYLAN THOMAS: "He was the most gregarious man in the world, and took pleasure in talking with strangers, who were treated as friends if he liked them at all. His *real* friends — people from Swansea, or the first years in London, or wartime years — watched him perform with strangers and called him 'Instant Dylan.'"

ON T.S. ELIOT: "Eliot suffered in early and middle life, turned Christian, lived through a 'hard coming' to Christianity, and through painful middle age; but in old age he found honor, joy in a second marriage, and he died full of years and glory."

ON EZRA POUND: "He concentrated his attention on a matter gravely important. Fragments assembled themselves in half a second, turned strong, sharp, and insistent; then dissipated quickly, sank into flaccidity, depression, and silence. In 1960 — though I could not know it then — Pound was verging on the brink of silence, that personal inferno where he lived out the last decade of his life."

Drawings by David Schorr

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